

# Introduction

*How did things ever go so far?*

Don Vito Corleone, surveying the ruinous Five Families War  
in Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*

This project has its origin in a number of questions which formed in my mind as I walked through Berlin during a trip I made there in the spring of 1992.

On my first day, I walked through the Brandenburg Gate from the Unter den Linden, leaving behind what until recently had been the beginning of the Soviet Empire which once stretched all the way to the Pacific Ocean. Just beyond the gate was a military show put on by units of the occupying powers. The kilted pipes and drum band of a Scottish regiment played some traditional martial tunes and was followed by a song and dance troupe from the Russian Army. In the background, through the trees, could be seen the rejuvenated Bundestag building, formerly the Reichstag, and watching the show was a small, but appreciative, group of Berliners who applauded with as much enthusiasm as the beer and sausages they were consuming would allow.

When the show was finished, I entered the Tiergarten Park and inspected the nearby Soviet Memorial, the monument to the units of the Red Army which stormed Berlin in the spring of 1945. Afterwards, I crossed through the Park towards the Potsdamer Platz, the area which was to pre-war Berlin what Piccadilly Circus is to London, or Times Square to New York, but which was obliterated during the war and left a virtual wasteland. Somewhere between there and the then barren area to the north which led back to the Brandenburg Gate was the site of Hitler's bunker, where he, the Führer of the Third Reich, chose to spend the last few months of his life and of the regime he had created.

The following day, I visited nearby Potsdam, the suburban residence of the Hohenzollern kings and the home of Prussian militarism. The town had been part of East Germany, the Communist German Democratic Republic, and looked it. Grey, dusty, and dismal, its buildings still pitted with bullet holes from the fighting of 1945, the town had obviously undergone no redevelopment since the war. But it was the palaces of the Prussian kings that I had come to see and these were not disappointing, in particular Sanssouci, which Frederick the Great, 'Old Fritz', (1712–1786) had built as a place in which to spend his leisure time, well away from the business of state. From here he went hunting with his beloved dogs, next to which (in his third grave) he is now buried, and here too he entertained the great minds of his time, including of course Voltaire, with whom he discussed philosophy and other matters of mutual interest.

On the hill behind Sanssouci is an old windmill, which was already old when Frederick began building his palace. The then owner of the windmill protested to Frederick's officials that the new palace would block the wind, thereby depriving his family of the livelihood they had enjoyed since the Middle Ages, and he threatened to take the King to court over the issue. Frederick's officials laughed this matter off, saying that the King was not answerable to the courts. However, Frederick himself took a different view. He pointed out that he must be seen to obey the law himself, otherwise his power would come to rest on fear and cynicism and not genuine respect. And when that happened, Frederick insisted, his authority would start to crumble. Frederick resolved the dispute by having the windmill raised, at his own expense, to a point where the wind was unrestricted by the palace building.

It is difficult to imagine Adolf Hitler behaving in this manner. Nevertheless, Frederick the Great was Hitler's greatest hero. Hitler, although a rich man from the royalties of his notorious book, *Mein Kampf*, which outsold the Bible during the Third Reich, and from the use of his profile on Germany's stamps, eschewed material wealth. One of the very few possessions he brought with him to his bunker in early 1945 was a painting of the Prussian King. Shortly before committing suicide there, Hitler took the painting off the wall and gave it to an aide.

Such affection would surely have been totally unrequited, for to compare Hitler with Frederick the Great would be akin to likening Al Capone to Thomas Jefferson. ‘Old Fritz’ was a despot to be sure, but he was a highly cultured man, and an icon of the Enlightenment. Hitler, by contrast, had the mentality of a thug, albeit a very clever one. Frederick’s designation is not in vain: he was a great general and ruler. Hitler was neither.

Why, then, I asked myself as I continued my visit to Berlin, did the Germans stand by Hitler to the very end? From mid-1943, Berlin had been subjected to very heavy bombing by the British and American airforces and then, in early 1945, it was assaulted by the Red Army, by which time hope of victory had vanished from the thoughts of all but the most fanatical of Hitler’s followers. The Italians shot Mussolini, Hitler’s ally, and hung his body (with that of his mistress, who died alongside him) from the roof of a petrol station for a crowd to abuse. But the Germans carried on obeying the will of their Führer until the whole nation was bludgeoned to the point of extinction. The Berliners fought until they were simply overwhelmed, by which time their once imposing city was almost totally obliterated. How had this come about? Fear of the Russians was an obvious factor, but it was clearly not the full answer, as a comparison with Napoleon shows.

In 1814, Napoleon – beset by almost every country in Europe including, of course, Russia – was allowed to abdicate and settle in an island in the Mediterranean. Even after his attempt to regain power was thwarted at Waterloo in June 1815, the British Government, which took him prisoner, merely removed him to an island in the South Atlantic. Hitler, who in personal terms can hardly be compared with Napoleon, could have expected no mercy if he had been taken prisoner by his enemies; he would have been hanged alongside the other Nazis in Nuremberg. However, what is important here is that Napoleon’s enemies drew a clear distinction between Napoleon and France. Indeed, Napoleon was overthrown not only by external force, but also by internal opposition in which the Emperor’s own Foreign Minister, Talleyrand, played a leading role. Moreover, once Napoleon was out of the way, and a ‘safe’ regime installed in Paris, in the form of the restored Bourbons, France’s neighbours were content and the

European family of nations returned to its peaceful business. Hitler's enemies refused to draw such a distinction. Germany herself became their target, not just the Nazi regime. Why?

Why did Hitler allow this situation to arise in the first place? Why did he *choose* to fight three powerful opponents simultaneously? It is true that Britain and France declared war on him. He defeated France in one swift campaign, but he chose to attack the Soviet Union before conquering, or at least making peace with, Britain. And then, when still engaged in a titanic struggle with the Soviet Union, came the strangest decision of all, the step which virtually ensured the defeat of Germany. On 11 December 1941, Hitler, in support of his Japanese allies, declared war on America, a move which has baffled historians to this day and which is generally seen as his fatal blunder. Why then did he take such a step?

After my return from Berlin, I tried to answer these, and other, questions about the Second World War, still the most dramatic episode in human history. Naturally, I read what there was available on the war itself. The bibliography on this subject is certainly huge, but despite this I was at the end of the day none the wiser. I was still unable to answer satisfactorily the questions which my trip to Berlin had produced. I soon realized that, in order to find such solutions, I would have to carry out my own research. I also realized that I would have to adopt a different approach from that of conventional, academic historians, albeit while maintaining at all times the same standards of accuracy and objectivity. This suited me, for in addition to being a history graduate of a medieval Scottish university, I have also been a colonial police detective. It was only natural therefore that I looked upon this subject as a case to be solved and as another opportunity to ask, 'Who benefits?' To answer this question, and the others which grew from it, I turned not to the 'hearsay' of historians but as far as possible to the primary material – the testimony of the participants and eyewitnesses themselves. Only in this way could I hope to show what happened and why.

Certainly, this approach – to get 'back to basics', as it were – is one which writers on the war have strangely neglected, especially in more recent years. As a young man, I studied avidly the works of Basil

Liddell Hart, J.F.C. Fuller and Chester Wilmot, men who had lived through the war and who produced books on it which, quite apart from their many other attractions, provided clear guidance as to where further research should be carried out. Unfortunately, this guidance does not seem to have sufficiently inspired subsequent students of the war. Consequently, the historiography of the conflict has suffered. Errors have crept in; assumptions have become accepted as fact; and obvious lines of inquiry have been ignored. Perhaps the most striking example of all involves the attitude of President Roosevelt towards Nazi Germany, a subject which in fact forms the core of this book.

Many writers have stated baldly that Roosevelt wanted to stay out of the war. The late A.J.P. Taylor, in his controversial *The Origins of the Second World War*, even goes so far as to say that, before entering the war in December 1941 as a result of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, America had 'asked only to be left alone'. Some historians have also expressed surprise that, once in the war, Roosevelt should have chosen to make Germany his prime target and not Japan. Sir Max Hastings begins his classic book on the Normandy invasion, *Overlord*, by describing Roosevelt's decision to defeat Germany first as 'Not the least remarkable aspect of the Second World War...' Max Hastings goes on immediately to draw attention to the fact that 'from December 1941 until June 1944, it was the Americans who were passionately impatient to confront the German army on the continent, while the British, right up to the eve of D-Day, were haunted by the deepest misgivings about doing so.'

A close study of what actually went on in Roosevelt's administration in 1941 reveals a very different picture. The memoirs of Roosevelt's advisers, and of Winston Churchill, show that Roosevelt saw very clearly that, as the head of the world's foremost trading nation, he simply could not stand by and let Hitler conquer the whole of Europe. This basic strategic fact was emphasized in a top-secret paper submitted to Roosevelt in September 1941 by General Marshall, the US Chief of Staff, who recommended that America should enter the European war at once and bring about 'the complete military defeat of Germany'. This confidential cry for war was then being publicly echoed by Douglas Miller, the former Commercial Attaché to the

American Embassy in Berlin, whose bestselling book *You Can't Do Business with Hitler*, published in the summer of 1941, claimed that Hitler's socialist policies posed such an economic threat to the United States that Germany should be *attacked* at once 'with every resource of our vast, free, and vigorous American nation'.<sup>1</sup> Victory for Hitler in Europe, Miller asserted, would be a disaster for America, whereas Germany's defeat, coupled with the adoption of the policies outlined in the last chapter of his book, entitled 'Our Post-War Policy', meant that America would have 'a world to gain'.

Roosevelt's attitude to this belligerence cannot be doubted. Not only did he praise Miller's book and criticize those Americans who thought that they could 'do business' with Hitler, he gave Miller an important job in his Government. A few months before America eventually entered the war, Douglas Miller became assistant to William Donovan, Roosevelt's spymaster, which meant that he was well placed to advise his President on how Germany should be defeated and America's world hegemony established. In short, Roosevelt's decision to fight Germany first was not as remarkable as Max Hastings, and others, have supposed. Amazing as it may seem, *this was a policy advocated in a book which guided Roosevelt into and through the Second World War.*

If Winston Churchill ever read *You Can't Do Business with Hitler*, he certainly did not appreciate the significance of the last chapter in the book, where Miller stated that there must be no compromise peace with Germany and that Britain's position was so weak that the Americans 'could undoubtedly secure British assent to any and all peace proposals that we had in mind'. As will be shown in due course, what all of this meant in practice came as a very rude shock to Churchill and led to a crude attempt to conceal what actually took place. That attempt has succeeded until now, when, for the first time, the astonishing truth about the adoption of 'Unconditional Surrender' as Allied policy is revealed.

My research in the Public Record Office and elsewhere shows that the official version of how this policy came to be accepted is based on

---

<sup>1</sup> Page 121 of *You Can't Do Business with Hitler* in the chapter entitled 'America's Decisive Opportunity'.

*forged documents*. Any standard work on the war will state that the British War Cabinet discussed President Roosevelt's policy of 'Unconditional Surrender' on the afternoon of 20 January 1943, and that the Cabinet agreed in principle to its adoption as Allied policy. I shall show that *this is not true* and that Churchill and his Cabinet were in fact tricked by Roosevelt into accepting this policy, which Roosevelt announced at the end of the Casablanca Conference in January 1943 in front of the world's press and without prior consultation with his allies. In accordance with Douglas Miller's book, this policy effectively ruled out a compromise peace with Germany and ensured that the Germans would fight to the very last against enormous odds. That struggle continued until Berlin itself was reduced to rubble.

The volume which follows is an attempt by a historical detective to explain in some detail how Berlin came to suffer this fate. Other than to state that Hitler's evil (and incredibly stupid) regime had to be destroyed, there is no attempt here to criticize, condemn or moralize. After all, great powers will try to become even greater powers and politician are ... well, politicians. There is, though, an important lesson to be learned here. The reunification of Germany and her burgeoning strength – the so-called 'German problem' of how to accommodate Germany within Europe – has returned, as it did before the Second World War. With the new, futuristic Berlin seemingly set to become the unofficial centre of Europe, it is surely essential to understand exactly what happened between 1939 and 1945 in order to ensure that the continent never again suffers such a disaster. Roosevelt, it must be remembered, justified his wartime policies on the grounds that they offered a reasonable guarantee of world peace for 50 years.

Those 50 years are now up and the division of post-war Europe created by Roosevelt and his main wartime ally, the Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin, disappeared with the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. A new and harmonious Europe is now being formed, one that is moving slowly but clearly towards some sort of unity. France and Germany are now almost one country and a modernizing Russia is shifting ever closer towards them. People have tended, however, to enthuse about all of this without stopping to reflect on the deeper

implications of these changes and without considering whether the end of the so-called Cold War has in fact made the world less, and not more, secure.

In this regard, it is instructive to quote the former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger who, on page 813 of his book *Diplomacy*, says more about American foreign policy in one paragraph than many writers do in a whole book:

Geopolitically, America is an island off the shores of the large landmass of Eurasia, whose resources and population far exceed those of the United States. The domination by a single power of either of Eurasia's two principal spheres – Europe or Asia – remains a good definition of strategic danger for America, Cold War or no Cold War. For such a grouping would have the capacity to outstrip America economically and, in the end, militarily. That danger would have to be resisted even were the dominant power apparently benevolent, for if the intentions ever changed, America would find itself with a grossly diminished capacity for effective resistance and a growing inability to shape events.

This is a sharp reminder of the old diplomatic adage that countries do not have permanent friends, only permanent interests. And one of America's permanent interests is to ensure that Europe does not become its rival. In fulfilling this aim, America has naturally inherited Britain's traditional policy of opposing the strongest country in Europe – *whichever one that may be* – in order to maintain a balance of power on the continent.

By the end of the 1930s, Germany had become – as it was before the First World War – the most powerful and, in many respects, the most advanced country in Europe. Hitler's naked aggression transformed this potential threat to the United States into a real and present danger. Roosevelt had to enter the European war that broke out in 1939 in order to stop Hitler from uniting Europe, just as in the seventeenth century, Cardinal Richelieu of France intervened in the Thirty Years War in order to prevent the unification of the German-speaking peoples. This is not at all a criticism of the American President, merely a statement of fact. Roosevelt would not have been doing his job if he had acted otherwise.

Now, however, the collapse of the European ‘balance of power’ which Roosevelt (and his successor, Truman) established with Stalin at the end of the war and the subsequent drift of the continent towards some sort of political union are withering the fruits of America’s victory in the Second World War. America’s role in Europe is being openly questioned and, with it, the continued relevance – and true purpose – of the NATO Alliance. Modern Europe is peaceful and democratic, but, as Henry Kissinger writes, this characteristic merely modifies the strategic danger to America. *It does not remove that danger.*

In this context, it is relevant to note that Cardinal Richelieu did not *prevent* the unification of Germany; he merely *delayed* it for some two centuries. As long as the Germans remained divided, France was *la Grande Nation*, at once universally copied, envied, admired and hated, in much the same way as America is now. The arrival of Bismarck’s united Germany after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 changed that. Here was a virile, new country which eclipsed France as the major power in Europe and proved itself a match for the rest of the continent put together. The strategic lesson is clear: European union *per se* is a danger to America, *la Grande Nation* of our age.

There is an additional factor to consider: America’s geopolitical position, as Kissinger points out, is Janus-like. The United States must look not just *east* to Europe, but also *west* to Asia. The main Asian threat to Roosevelt’s America was of course Japan. The main current threat to America from Asia is perceived to be China, whose economy, many say, will become more powerful than that of the United States within the next few decades. Modern China is not a democracy, but a totalitarian state practising a form of state-controlled capitalism with considerable success. On the other hand, it is a traditionally peaceful country with, at the time of writing, no expansionist tendencies.

Here, though, Kissinger’s caveat must be noted. The academic historian turned diplomat states unequivocally that the possibility of Europe or Asia falling under the effective control of *any dominant power*, even one which appeared to be friendly, would have to be resisted by the United States. He does not elaborate on what form that resistance would take, but his comments must surely be considered by anyone interested in the future of mankind.

I hope that the following work will provide much food for thought on the Second World War and its aftermath. I understand that not everyone will find this food palatable, but I can only say that a historian must be dispassionate and objective to the extent that human nature will permit. Anyone who seriously attempts to reconstruct the past – *to find out what happened and why* – must strive to put aside all personal feelings and all nationalistic pride. Indeed, a historian, it has been wisely said, should have no nationality. Propaganda and mythology doubtless have their place, but if the truth about the past is to be found, a historian must treat his material in the same way as a doctor his patient, a lawyer his case, and a mechanic his car.

After all, human progress is achieved by asking the right questions and finding the correct answers. To fail to follow this dialectic, the careful process of cause and effect, is to do insult to the unique feature of our species and by extension to all that we have accomplished. Hamlet, who is himself tormented by a question central to his very existence, addresses this same subject:

What is a man,  
 If his chief good and market of his time  
 Be but to sleep and feed? a beast, no more.  
 Sure he that made us with such large discourse,  
 Looking before and after, gave us not  
 That capability and god-like reason  
 To fust in us unus'd.