From Europe to China: West Germany’s Ostpolitik and Nixon’s Detente with China (II)

Rhee Tong-Chin

To fully understand the problems of European psychology and the rising tensions and disagreements in the Atlantic Alliance, it is always instructive to review the damage done to Europe by the years of war. Europe lay in utter ruins from Britain to the Soviet Union, from Scandinavia to the Balkans. People everywhere were stunned and paralyzed by the scale of death so immensely incomprehensible that they were dazed for years after the end of the war.\textsuperscript{57} As Douglas Botting’s \textit{The Aftermath: Europe} put it:

At least 33 million Europeans are known to have lost their lives in World War II. The killing, especially of civilians, was so widespread and casual that estimates of the toll vary by many millions, and some historians have stated that well over 40 million people perished. By comparison, the 1914-1918 “Great War” had caused a combined total of about 20 million military and civilian deaths.

Eastern Europe had suffered the most...Partly in combat, but mostly through cold-blooded murder, Poland lost more than one sixth of its prewar population of 32 million...The Soviet Union lost 20 million soldiers and civilians—more than 10 per cent of its prewar population.

Germany, too, paid a dreadful human price for the devastation it unleashed. More than three million fighting men were killed, as well as immense numbers of civilians. In addition, approximately two million German-speaking civilians died during forced emigrations from the Slavic lands of Eastern Europe after the War...

In the War and its aftermath, between 50 to 60 million European civilians—about 10 per cent of the total population—were uprooted from their homes under unimaginable cruel conditions. Many of these displaced persons were murdered by hostile soldiers or civilians; many died of starvation and exposure. For years after V-E Day, bedraggled bands of DPs wandered throughout the Continent or wasted away in camps set up for

\textsuperscript{57} For the comprehensive description of Germany’s destruction and human suffering, see Victor Gollancz. \textit{In Darkest Germany} (Hinsdale, Illinois: Henry Regnery Co., 1947), especially pp. 89-126, 127-174.
them by the Allies.\textsuperscript{58) 59)}

Physically, Europe was wrecked from one end to the other:

\cdots Few cities of any size escaped damage from air raids, shellfire, street fighting and the scorched-earth tactics of the Russians and the Germans. Of the belligerent capitals, Warsaw and Berlin were nearly wiped out. To many Poles it seemed that Warsaw might never be rebuilt; in Berlin people were estimating that it might take 15 years just to clear the rubble. Capitals such as London, Vienna, Budapest and Belgrade were severely damaged, as were scores of other large cities that provided Europe with much of its culture and character.\textsuperscript{59)}

Besides, many towns and villages were utterly erased from the earth leaving in many cases a swath of ghost towns across Europe.

Horrible damage to the physical appearance of the continent was equally matched by the wholesale destruction of cultural legacies of its civilization and the deep “spiritual injury,” leaving “a psychological shock that produced a wasteland of the mind.”

The War’s horrors left a sickness not only in the minds of individuals but in the collective psyche of Europe as well, requiring a radical reassessment of the nature of the society that would be reshaped in the ruins. Pessimists doubted whether Europe would ever be rebuilt. Others, as a consequence of the worst excesses of the War, were plagued by a guilt about the nature of man.\textsuperscript{92)}

Winston Churchill wrote in 1947: “What is Europe now? A rubble heap, a charnel house, a breeding ground of pestilence and hate.” On the whole, Europeans had to face the bleak future “in a continent half graveyard and half junkyard.”\textsuperscript{61)} Europe had changed unrecognizably—its political map largely redrawn, as some nations disappeared completely and others were badly divided. The political boundaries had been brutally altered.

If these were the memories of the Second World War, it is not difficult to imagine why—given the more revolutionary weapons of mass destruction—the Europeans began to entertain serious doubts about the benefits of the Atlantic Alliance, which no longer gave them comfort and confidence. No wonder at all why they would not want to place their survival as a continent in a power whose geographic separation alone, with its fundamental differences in basic interest, would make it highly suspect in their eyes.

The central problem, therefore, was that the United States had consistently failed to recognize for too long that the root of intra-