commander in chief, General Joseph Joffre, agreed but reached the opposite conclusion. Trained to seize the offensive, he regarded the withdrawal as suicidal and pleaded with the premier to mobilize. By the morning of August 1, he had declared that since each twenty-four-hour delay before general mobilization would mean a 15- to 20-kilometer loss of territory, he would refuse to take the responsibility as commander. Several hours later, he had his way and the premier authorized full mobilization.

England was the only major European power that had no military conscription. The cabinet hoped to keep the nation out of war, but it also realized that England's national interest was tied to the preservation of France. As Sir Edward Grey put it in a typical understatement: "If Germany dominated the continent, it would be disagreeable to us as well as to others, for we should be isolated."[48] As the tension mounted, the cabinet became increasingly divided. The man who most clearly saw the imminent outbreak of war on the continent was Winston Churchill, first lord of the admiralty. On July 28 Churchill ordered the fleet to sail to its war base at Scapa Flow, and thus prepared it for possible action and probably saved it from a surprise torpedo attack. When Germany declared war on Russia on August 1, Churchill asked the cabinet to mobilize the fleet instantly. Encountering no opposition, he went to the Admiralty and promptly issued the order to activate the fleet.

We see, then, that the chiefs of state of every European nation involved in a military alliance were pressed by their general staffs to mobilize. The generals, under the relentless pressure of their self-imposed timetables, stridently demanded action lest even one crucial hour be lost to the enemy. The pressure on the brink was such that ultimately the outbreak of war was experienced not as a world tragedy but as a liberating explosion.

CONCLUSION

It is my conviction that during the descent into the abyss, the perceptions of statesmen and generals were absolutely crucial. For the sake of clarity and precision, I should like to consider the following dimensions of this phenomenon: (1) a leader's perception of himself, (2) his perceptions of his adversary's character, (3) his perceptions of the adversary's intentions, (4) his perceptions of the

adversary's power and capabilities, and (5) his capacity for empathy with his adversary.

All the participants suffered from greater or lesser distortions in their images of themselves. They tended to see themselves as honorable, virtuous, and pure, and the adversary as diabolical. The leaders of Austria-Hungary probably provide the best illustration of this. Berchtold and Hötzendorff perceived their country as the bastion of European civilization. They saw an Austria-Hungary fighting not only for its national honor but for its very existence against an enemy who had it "by the throat." The possibility of losing prestige and sinking to the status of a second-class power was anathema to the two Austrian leaders. Therefore, they deemed it essential to take a firm and fearless stand that, in their minds, would make a potential enemy back down. The fact that not only Serbia, but Russia too, perceived the Austrian action as aggression never seriously perturbed either Berchtold or his chief of staff. If aggression is defined as the use of force against the territory of another nation in violation of the wishes of that nation's people, then indeed the Austrian move against Serbia fits that definition. Yet the Austrians never saw their action in that light, and charges of aggression were simply ignored. In their zeal to defend Austria's honor and to ensure her status as a major power, Berchtold and Hötzendorff stepped over the edge of a precipice. Their sights were so set on their goal that they failed to pay attention to the world around them; they virtually ignored the reactions of their ally, Germany, and those of their potential adversaries, Russia, England, and France. In their eagerness to vindicate the image of Austria as a virile nation, they led their country to destruction.

Diabolical enemy images were rampant during the crisis, but probably the clearest and most destructive of these were entertained by Kaiser Wilhelm. Before the crisis had reached the boiling point, the Kaiser's efforts to mediate between Austria and Russia were carried out fairly rationally and constructively. But when the czar decided to mobilize, Wilhelm's deep-seated prejudices against the Slavic peoples broke through and sent him into a frenzy. As tensions mounted, this frenzy assumed paranoid proportions and was finally redirected, of all things, toward England, which at that very moment was making every effort to preserve the peace. Wilhelm saw devils in both Russia and England; this perception, more than any other, led to his decision to strike first.

All the nations on the brink of the disaster expected the worst from their potential adversaries. The Russian leadership provides a case in point. Because the czar and his generals felt themselves to be threatened by Austria, Sazonov, who "did not hate Austria, but despised her," responded with threats of hostile action. As Berchtold and Hötzendorff, and later the Kaiser, perceived the Russians' hostility, they too escalated their hostile behavior. These acts convinced the Russians that their initial perceptions had been correct. Thereafter, the diplomatic exchanges became increasingly negative and threatening, and not even the "Willy-Nicky" telegrams were able to save the situation. When a nation designates another nation as its enemy and does so emphatically enough and long enough, the perception will eventually come to be true.

Perceptions of power during the crisis were particularly revealing. During the early phases, leaders notoriously tended to exaggerate their own power and describe their enemies as weaker than they really were. Wilhelm's pledge to Austria, for example, displayed a fundamental contempt for Russia's military power and an exaggerated confidence in his influence on the Russian leadership. Similarly, the Austrians had contempt for Russia's military machine, which they perceived as more cumbersome and weaker than it actually was. As stress mounted, however, these perceptions gradually changed and were soon replaced by acute fears of inferiority. Interestingly enough, these fears did not deter any of the participants from actually going to war. At the boiling point, all leaders tended to perceive their own alternatives as more restricted than those of their adversaries. They saw their own options as limited by necessity or "fate," whereas those of the adversary were characterized by many choices. This may help explain the curiously mechanistic quality that pervaded the attitudes of statesmen everywhere on the eve of the outbreak: the "we cannot go back now" of Franz-Joseph; the "iron dice" of Bethmann; and the absolute determinism and enslavement to their timetables of the military leaders, who perceived the slightest advantage of the enemy as catastrophic.

Everywhere, there was a total absence of empathy; no one could see the situation from another point of view. Berchtold did not see that, to a Serbian patriot, Austria's action would look like naked aggression. He did not see that, to the Russian leadership, war might seem the only alternative to intolerable

humiliation; nor did he see the fateful mood swings of his ally, the German Kaiser, from careless overconfidence to frenzied paranoia. Wilhelm's growing panic and total loss of balance made any empathy impossible. And the Russians' contempt for Austria and fear of Germany had the same effect.

Finally, one is struck with the overwhelming mediocrity of the people involved. The character of each of the leaders, diplomats, or generals was badly flawed by arrogance, stupidity, carelessness, or weakness. There was a pervasive tendency to place the preservation of one's ego before the preservation of peace. There was little insight and no vision whatsoever. And there was an almost total absence of excellence and generosity of spirit. It was not fate or Providence that made these people fail so miserably; it was their own evasion of responsibility. As a result of their weakness, a generation of Europe's young men was destroyed. The sins of the parents were truly visited on the sons, who forfeited their lives. Of all the cruelties that people have inflicted on one another, the most terrible have always been brought by the weak against the weak.

I should like to conclude this chapter with one of the most enduring true vignettes that have emerged from World War I.

On Christmas Day 1914, German and British troops put up banners to wish each other season's greetings, sang "Silent Night" in both languages, and eventually climbed out of their opposing trenches to play a Christmas Day football match in No Man's Land and share German beer and English plum jam. After Christmas, they went back to killing each other.

After the failure of the Christmas Truce of 1914, the chivalry that still prevailed in the early months of the Great War was soon cast aside by all sides. And then, the road was open, straight and wide, to the abyss of the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. F. H. Hinsley, *Power and the Pursuit of Peace* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 296.
2. See, for example, Sidney Bradshaw Fay, *The Origins of the World War*, 2 vols. (New York: Free Press, 1928–1930); Luigi Albertini, *The Origins of the War of 1914*, 3 vols. (London: 1952–1957); or Fritz Fischer, *Griff nach der Weltmacht* (Hamburg: 1961).

CONCLUSION

How was it possible for Hitler to inflict himself on the German people, to mesmerize them, and to take them with him to disaster in the wastes of Russia?

I am convinced that Hitler's charismatic grip on Germany can best be explained by the authoritarian structure of the German family. Erik Erikson paints a convincing portrait of the typical German father, whose frequent remoteness and tyranny over his children make their maturation process excessively difficult:

> When the father comes home from work, even the walls seem to pull themselves together. . . . The children hold their breath, for the father does not approve of "nonsense"—that is, neither of the mother's feminine moods nor of the children's playfulness. . . .
>
> Later, when the boy comes to observe the father in company, when he notices his father's subservience to superiors, and when he observes his excessive sentimentality when he drinks and sings with his equals, the boy acquires the first ingredient of *Weltschmerz:* a deep doubt of the dignity of man—or at any rate of the "old man." . . .
>
> The average German father's dominance and harshness was not blended with the tenderness and dignity which come from participation in an integrating cause. Rather, the average father, either habitually or in decisive moments, came to represent the habits and ethics of the German top sergeant and petty official who—"dress'd in a little brief authority"—would never be more but was in constant danger of becoming less; and who had sold the birthright of a free man for an official title or a life pension.[50]

This kind of father, of course, makes the son's adolescence an unusually difficult period of "storm and stress" that becomes a strange mixture of open rebellion and submissive obedience, of romanticism and despondency. For each act of rebellion the boy suffers profound guilt, but for each act of submission he is punished by self-disgust. Hence, the search for identity frequently ends in stunned exhaustion, with the boy "reverting to type" and, despite everything, identifying with his father. The excessively severe superego implanted by the father in his son during childhood has entrenched itself like a garrison in a conquered city. The boy now becomes a "bourgeois" after all, but he suffers eternal shame for having succumbed.

During the 1930s the catalytic agent that offered the possibility of escape from this vicious cycle was Adolf Hitler. In the Führer's world the adolescent could feel emancipated. The motto of the Hitler Youth, "Youth shapes its own destiny," was profoundly appealing to a youth whose psychological quest for identity was often thwarted. Erikson points out that Hitler did not fill the role of the father image. Had he done so, he would have elicited great ambivalence in German youth. Rather, he became the symbol of a glorified older brother, a rebel whose will could never be crushed, an unbroken adolescent who could lead others into self-sufficiency—in short, a leader. Since he had become their conscience, he made it possible for the young to rebel against authority without incurring guilt. Hermann Goering echoed the sentiments of the Hitler Youth when he stated categorically that his conscience was Adolf Hitler. It was this complete official absolution from guilt that made the German pattern of authoritarianism unique.

Parents were to be silenced if their views conflicted with the official doctrines of the Third Reich: "All those who from the perspective of their experience and from that alone combat our method of letting youth lead youth, must be silenced."[51] The young Nazi was taught that he was destined by Providence to bring a new order to the world. Young Nazi women too felt a surge of pride to learn that childbirth, legitimate or illegitimate, was a meaningful act because "German women must give children to the Führer." I recall how, on numerous occasions, large groups of young women would march through the streets chanting in chorus: "We want to beget children for the Führer!" National socialism made it possible for the young to rid themselves of their deep-seated personal insecurities by merging their identities with the image of a superior and glorious German nation. This image of a common future was well expressed in the famous Nazi marching song sung by the German soldiers as they advanced into Russia: "Let everything go to pieces, we shall march on. For today Germany is ours; tomorrow the whole world!"

Gregor Strasser summed up Hitler's appeal concisely:

> Hitler responds to the vibrations of the human heart with the delicacy of a seismograph . . . enabling him, with a certainty with which no conscious gift could endow him, to act as a loudspeaker proclaiming the most secret desires, the least permissible instincts, the sufferings, and personal revolts of a whole nation.[52]

It apparently was Hitler's gift to suspend the critical faculty of others and to assume that role for himself alone. He appealed to the deepest unconscious human longings. His premium on harshness and brutality and his rejection of all things civilized and gentle caused those who were victimized by him to strive constantly to be what they were not and to exterminate that which they were. In the end, in fighting for Hitler in Russia, his soldiers and his generals were fighting unconsciously for what appeared to them to be their own psychological integrity. To face themselves and what they had done honestly and without rationalization would have meant the collapse of their entire worldview and complete psychological disintegration. The only way for the German people to break this fatal bond with Hitler was to drink the cup of bitterness to the end and go down with him to destruction.

What was Stalin's role in the Soviet recovery from the initial disaster? No doubt, the Soviet leader received a great deal of help from Hitler. The Nazi leader's policy of treating Russians as subhumans to be shipped as slaves to the German Reich soon encountered fierce resistance. Early Russian defections to the German side quickly ceased, and the Nazi invaders found themselves confronted by a nation fighting for its survival.

Even more important, Stalin immediately perceived that the Russian soldier would not give his life for Communism, the party, or its leader, but that he would fight to the death for his Russian homeland. In his first broadcast after the invasion on July 3, Stalin appealed to "Comrades, citizens, brothers and sisters, fighters of our Army and Navy" to repel the invaders in a "great patriotic war." This was something new. Stalin had never spoken like this before. He conjured up images of Napoleon and Wilhelm II, who also had been smashed by a people fighting for their motherland. This war, Stalin said, was not an ordinary war between two armies; it was a war of the entire Soviet people fighting against the Nazi hordes. In short, Stalin appealed to the national loyalties, rather than to Communist loyalties, of the Russian population. It was going to be 1812 all over again.

The effect of this speech was electric. Until that time there had always been something artificial in the public adulation of Stalin. After all, he had been associated with forced collectivization and the terror of the Great Purges. But now, after this patriotic appeal, which greatly resembled Churchill's famous "blood, toil, tears, and sweat" speech just before Dunkirk, the Russian people felt that they had a strong and able war leader. Konstantin Simonov, in his novel *The Living and the Dead*, wrote a poignant description of the impact of Stalin's address on soldiers in a field hospital:

> There was a discrepancy between that even voice and the tragic situation of which he spoke; and in this discrepancy there was strength. People were not surprised. It was what they were expecting from Stalin. They loved him in different ways, wholeheartedly, or with reservations; admiring him and yet fearing him; and some did not like him at all. But nobody doubted his courage and his iron will. And now was a time when these two qualities were needed more than anything else in the man who stood at the head of a country at war.[53]

This passage is particularly remarkable since it was written in 1958, at the height of Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" drive. But evidently the author was unwilling to distort the truth on this cardinal point. Most Western observers who heard the speech also testified to its critical, even decisive, importance.

After the story of the outbreak of this terrible war is told, one final truth emerges with striking clarity: Hitler ultimately lost the war because he despised everything and everybody including the German people whom he professed to love. In the end, Stalin emerged triumphant despite his blunders and his purges because he was able to convince the Russian people that he was committed to the preservation of their homeland. Hitler never learned from his mistakes when the fortunes of war began to go against him in Russia. He compounded them again and again until disaster became a certainty. Stalin, on the other hand, did learn from his initial errors and thus was able to turn a rout into a final victory. The war in Russia became the supreme character test for both

men and revealed them to the core. In Stalin, madness never gained the upper hand; in Hitler, madness conquered.

NOTES

1. Barton Whaley, *Codeword Barbarossa* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1973), p. 7.
2. Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Adolf Hitler* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 430.
3. Ibid., p. 336.
4. Documents on German Foreign Policy, Files of the German Foreign Office, VII, pp. 156–157.
5. Cited in *Life and Death of Adolf Hitler,* p. 361.
6. Cited in William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett 1960), p. 1047.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid., p. 1048.
9. Ibid., p. 1053.
10. Paul Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter* (New York: Heinemann, 1951), p. 212.
11. *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* p. 1061.
12. Ibid., p. 1062.
13. Ibid., p. 1063.
14. Ibid., pp. 1064–1065.
15. Ibid., p. 1078.
16. *Hitler's Interpreter,* p. 220.
17. *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* p. 1080.
18. Ibid.
19. Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW), Minutes of the Meeting, *Trials of War Criminals before the Nuremberg Military Tribunals,* Vol. 4 of 15 vols. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951–1952), pp. 275–278.
20. *Life and Death of Adolf Hitler,* p. 419.
21. Ibid., p. 431.
22. *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* p. 1093.
23. Cited in *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* pp. 1114–1115.
24. Severin Bialer, ed., *Stalin and His Generals* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), p. 181.
25. Ibid., p. 180.