# MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

by Teodoro Tagliaferri (University of Naples Federico II)

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## WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, V

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NOTE

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PEACE, EMPIRE, AND WORLD GOVERNMENT

by Arnold J. Toynbee

*Napoleon almost created an international political structure; now, with only two great powers on the scene, man has a comparable – but fleeting – opportunity.*

Today most people in the world are inclined to take the prevailing political dispensation for granted. It is assumed that the present partition of mankind among a number of local sovereign states that can, and do, go to war with each other is the natural order of human affairs at the political level. Yet this is not the only way in which mankind has organized itself politically since the rise of civilization about 5000 years ago. For instance, in 800 A.D. the whole of the Western world, within its limits at that date, was united politically under the single sovereignty of Charlemagne, except for a few small states in Britain and in Northwestern Spain. And when, on Christmas Day, 800, Charlemagne assumed the title of Roman Emperor, he was deliberately reviving in the West a Roman world-state which, for more than four centuries ending about 400 A.D., had united politically the greater part of Western Europe with a ring of territories surrounding the Mediterranean basin.

In the West, these spells of political unity have been relatively short-lived. Charlemagne's unitary Western Empire did not outlast Charlemagne's own lifetime, and the Roman Empire's previous duration of four centuries in the West was short compared with its duration in the Levant, where, with its capital transplanted to Constantinople, it continued to have an effective existence till the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The East Roman Empire's duration, again, was short compared with that of the Ancient Egyptian Empire and the Chinese Empire. The Ancient Egyptian Empire had been in existence, off and on, for about 3000 years by the year 31 B.C, when it was absorbed into the Roman Empire. The Chinese Empire is still a going concern, and, as 1967 began it had been in existence, off and on, for 2188 years.

These past attempts at the establishment of a world-state have had only a limited success. None of them has been either world-wide or permanent. Still, they have given peace to millions of human beings for numbers of centuries, and today their history is of more than academic interest now that the present partition of the world into a host of local sovereign states has been overtaken by the invention of the atomic weapon.

In the history of the current international system the price of local sovereignty has been a series of wars of increasing violence, culminating in the dropping of the two atomic bombs on Japan in 1945. It may be that the only alternative to self-destruction now is the establishment of some form of world government – this time on the literally world-wide scale that was never achieved by any of the would-be world-empires of the past. In the Atomic Age this cannot be achieved by conquest, for an atomic war would end, not in victory and defeat, but in mutual annihilation. In the Atomic Age world government can be established, if at all, only by mutual consent. The major political problem of our time is how we are to arrive at world government from mankind's present plight of being partitioned among about 125 local states. One essential preliminary to the solution of this formidable problem is to understand the nature and the history of the current system of international relations.

The current system of international relations originated, on a small scale, among the medieval city-states of Northern Italy. It was extended to Transalpine Europe when the French invaded Italy in 1494. In the ensuing first bout of international warfare in the modern age of Western history, a pattern was set which had been anticipated in medieval Italy and which has been repeated, on a constantly widening geographical scale, through the time of the Second World War. Again and again, some single power has tried to unite, under its own domination, first Northern Italy, then Western and Central Europe, and finally the whole surface of the globe. In each case the power aiming at domination has been foiled.

In the first modern round of this repeatedly renewed conflict, the power· that was aiming at domination was the Hapsburg dynasty, and the Hapsburgs were foiled by France. At the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the Hapsburgs had added to their original dominions in what is now Austria the greater part of the Burgundian dominions, including the whole of the Netherlands, together with the already united Spanish kingdoms of Castile

and Aragon. Both Austria and Spain were poor and thinly populated, but the Netherlands were populous and productive, and Spain had recently redressed its deficiencies at home by acquiring a vast empire in the New World. Charles V, who had gathered all these dominions into his own hands, was also elected Roman Emperor (i.e., successor to Charlemagne), and his objective was to make a reality of his nominally universal rule. But, to do this, he would have had to break the power of France and this was beyond his strength; for France not only held the interior lines, now that it had been effectively unified by King Louis XI (reigned 1461-1483), it was by far the most populous single state in the Western world, with by far the largest amount of first-class cultivable land. France defeated the Hapsburgs' attempt to encircle and subdue it and the peace treaty of Westphalia (1648) marked the end of this attempt at empire-building.

The next round was started by the first of France's two attempts to win for itself the political supremacy in the Western world that it had prevented the Hapsburgs from winning. Each time, France was foiled in its turn; each time, by a coalition in which one power played a leading part. The moving spirit in the successful resistance to Louis XIV's attempt to unite the Western world under France's supremacy was Holland – a fragment of the Hapsburg dominions which had won its independence at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Louis XIV's aim was to secure for his grandson the Spanish portion of the Hapsburg dominions, which at this time included the Southern Netherlands, the Duchy of Milan, and the kingdom of the "Two Sicilies", besides Spain itself and the Spanish Empire overseas. Louis XIV did succeed in acquiring Spain and its overseas dominions for the Bourbon dynasty, but the Spanish Crown's European dominions outside Spain were taken by the victors, and Spain alone was by now too decrepit to give the Bourbons the decisive preponderance in Europe at which Louis XIV had been aiming.

France's second attempt at gaining supremacy in the Western world was made in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars at the turn of the nineteenth century. Napoleon came nearer to succeeding than Louis XIV. Indeed, if the area that Napoleon was trying to dominate had been no larger than Louis XIV's world, it seems probable that he would have succeeded in uniting it permanently under French domination. During the intervening century, however, the Western world had expanded considerably in two directions. Overland

eastward it had come, since Peter the Great's time, to include the huge Russian Empire. Overseas, the new world that had been opened up in all quarters of the globe by West European maritime enterprise since the fifteenth century had now become an important factor in the economic life of the Western world. The economic strength of these overseas annexes of Western Europe was thrown onto the scales, against France, by Great Britain, Napoleonic France's chief Western opponent, which held a world-wide command of the seas. Between them, British naval and economic power and Russia's vast spaces foiled Napoleonic France.

Until the overseas parts of the Western world grew to full stature, as they did in the post-Napoleonic age, France surpassed all other Western powers in population, agricultural wealth, and military manpower; but it was not these material resources alone that made it capable of becoming an effective unifying force in the Western world. The strongest card in France's hand, in both Louis XIV's and Napoleon's day, was the attractiveness of its culture. Peoples that resisted France's attempts to dominate them militarily and politically adopted French culture of their own accord, and indeed with enthusiasm; and the peoples that did temporarily fall under French rule or ascendancy continued to bear the impress of French culture after they had shaken off French rule.

France, in fact, had many precious and highly prized gifts to offer in compensation for its unpopular attempts to impose its hegemony. A Napoleonic French gift that was of special value for Western Germany and for Northern Italy was the French technique of rational administration on what, for the times, was a large scale. Before the temporary Napoleonic conquest of them, these two regions had each been a mosaic of small states with antiquated institutions. Under the Napoleonic regime, they were tidied up and modernized by able and experienced and enlightened French administrators. The Napoleonic regime was short-lived; yet the non-French parts of Napoleon's empire, as well as France itself, drew cultural and social profits from this regime by which they are still benefiting at the present day.

Until the invention and use of the atomic weapon at the end of the Second World War, it was assumed, as a matter of course, that it would have been a calamity if any of the powers that were successive aspirants to universal dominion had succeeded in achieving its aim, and accordingly the powers that were chiefly instrumental in foiling the aims of the ambitious

empire-builders regarded themselves, and were regarded by their allies, as being benefactors of the Western society. France was given credit for having foiled the Hapsburgs; Holland and Britain were given it for having foiled France; and so were France, Britain, and the United States for having foiled Germany.

Looking back now, from the Atomic Age to the "modern" chapter of Western history which was brought to an end by the two twentieth-century world wars, we may well wonder whether, on a long view, it would not have been better for the West, and for the world as a whole, if Napoleon had succeeded in uniting Western and Central Europe permanently under his ascendancy. If he had united that much of the world permanently, he or his successors would assuredly have succeeded in adding the rest of the world to their empire sooner or later; the French Empire, like the Roman Empire before it, would eventually have won the hearts of the peoples whom it had originally incorporated in itself by force of arms, and then mankind would have been united more or less acquiescently under a literally world-wide world government before it had been overtaken by the Atomic Age. If history had taken this turn – and it might have taken it – should we not be sleeping more soundly today than we find ourselves able to sleep now that we are haunted by the nightmare of a possible atomic third world war?

When Napoleon was foiled the world lost its chance of being united politically before the close of the pre-Atomic Age. The next and last two attempts at conquering universal dominion before the invention of the atomic weapon were Germany's. Its attempts, too, were foiled in their turn, at the cost of two world wars. In the First World War the brunt was borne by France, in the Second it was borne by Britain; but neither war could have been won against Germany if the anti-German alliance had not been reinforced by the massive power of the United States. Like France before it, Germany twice came near to success in its attempt to impose its rule by conquest; but, unlike Napoleon's ephemeral empire, Germany's had no prospect of lasting, for Germany failed to bring to the peoples that it momentarily conquered any gifts of the kind that had gone far toward reconciling the Germans themselves, the Italians, Belgians, and Dutch to being incorporated in Napoleonic France.

A noteworthy feature of the play of political forces in the modern international arena is the series of changes in the membership of the ring of "great powers". The Hapsburg

dynasty's failure to get the better of France was followed by the decline of both the Spanish and the Austrian portion of Charles V's heritage. This decline of the far-flung Hapsburg power created so great a political vacuum in the Western world that it left room not only for France to make a bid for supremacy but for two countries with relatively small populations to attain great-power status. Holland first successfully revolted from Philip II's Spain and then successfully opposed Louis XIV's France. Sweden competed with the Danubian Hapsburg Monarchy in the Thirty Years' War for the hegemony over Germany. Neither Holland nor Sweden, however, was able to sustain this arduous role for more than about a century. After the foiling of Louis XIV's attempt to establish France's ascendancy had been confirmed in 1713 in the peace settlement of Utrecht, Holland and Sweden lost their great-power status, as Spain had lost its already.

The membership of the ring of great powers has not changed after the checking of every attempt by some single power to impose its ascendancy. France's second attempt, in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars, was more formidable than Louis XIV's had been, and it came nearer than his attempt had come to succeeding. Yet the set of great powers that entered the arena in 1792 stepped out of it, unchanged, in 1815. There were five of them – France, Britain, Austria, Prussia, and Russia; of these five, Russia alone was non-European and non-Western, and Russia had made itself a great power by deliberately adopting the Western way of life.

By contrast, an even more revolutionary change than the one in the early eighteenth century has been produced by the cumulative effect of the two world wars in which Germany's attempt at world power was foiled in the course of the first half of the twentieth century. This time two great powers – first Austria-Hungary and then Prussia-Germany itself – have been not merely reduced to a lower rank, but have been wiped off the map, and five – France, Britain, Italy, Japan, and Prussia-German's West German successor-state – have been depressed to a secondary level. In 1967 there are only two great powers – the United States and the Soviet Union – and of these two only Russia had already been a great power before the round of world wars began. The United States did not assume the role of a great power before its intervention in the First World War, though it had a great enough population and economic potential to play the part, if it had chosen, since the date of the

preservation of the Union through the defeat of the Confederacy in the Civil War of 1861-1865.

The annihilation of Austria-Hungary and Prussia-Germany has been an unusual fate for great powers in the modern Western power game as far as this game has yet been played. Other states that have lost their great-power status have not also lost their existence; but there have been striking differences in their reactions to the challenge of being reduced to a lower political rank. Holland and Sweden went through a period of eclipse in the eighteenth century but rallied in the nineteenth century. They did not become great powers again in the military and political sense but they did regain an important place in the world by virtue of new economic and cultural achievements. On the other hand, Spain has not, so far, found a new role for itself since it ceased to be a great power. Its decline began at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and, up till now, it has failed to revive. It remains to be seen whether France, Great Britain, West Germany, and Japan are now going to react in the Spanish way or in the Dutch and Swedish way.

Of all the former great powers, France had the longest run. In spite of suffering a number of reverses, it was a great power from 1494 to 1940. None of France's competitors has measured up to France's four and a half centuries of continuous military and political potency. The Danubian Hapsburg Monarchy had been a great power for a little less than four centuries by the time of its extinction in 1918. Great Britain was a great power for about two and a half centuries, reckoning from the War of the Spanish Succession to the Second World War inclusive. Russia, which is still a great power, became one at about the same time as Great Britain. Prussia had been one for about 200 years by the time of its extinction in 1945. Holland's and Sweden's careers as great powers were only about a hundred years long, as has been noted already. Japan had been a great power for less than half a century when it lost that status in 1945. The United States has been playing the part of a great power for only half a century now.

Today it seems unlikely that any of the surviving ex-great powers will ever recover great-power status. At the same time the United States and the Soviet Union cannot count on continuing for an indefinite time to be the only two great powers on the face of the globe. It is possible that China may challenge successfully these two countries' present joint

monopoly. China was not merely a great power, but the unique world power in its half of the world for 2060 years, reckoning from its political unification in 221 B.C. to its defeat by Great Britain, in the war that Great Britain made upon it, in 1839. In the course of those two millennia, China, like France in the modern age, suffered a number of reverses. It went through bouts of disunity and of subjection to Central Asian nomads; but, each time, it eventually recovered its unity and its independence.

It was Britain's onslaught on China in 1839 that suddenly degraded it from being "the Middle Kingdom" to being a semi-colonial area whose inhabitants ranked, in Western eyes, as "natives". China went through a century (1839-1945) of impotence and humiliation. From this it has now re-emerged; it is evidently determined to recover its normal position of greatness, and it seems at last to have recognized, as Japan recognized a century earlier and Russia two centuries and a half earlier, that, if it wills to hold its own in a Westernized world, it must also will the means, and that the necessary means is a mastery of up-to-date Western technology. It is possible, though of course not certain, that in the early Atomic Age China is going to take its place side by side with the Soviet Union and the United States as one of the world's great powers.

These repeated changes in the membership of the ring of great powers have been one of the features of the modern system of international relations. Another feature of it has been the constant expansion of the geographical arena in which the power game has been played. In the Middle Ages this arena was confined to Northern and Central Italy, with Venice and Florence exerting themselves successfully to hinder Milan's attempts to achieve a pan-Italian hegemony. At the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which marked the beginning of the Modern Age, the arena expanded geographically from Italy to include Transalpine Europe. The Italian city-states, which had previously been the great powers within their own relatively small field, now became the prizes of victory for Transalpine great powers of the nation-state scale that contended for them on battlefields in Lombardy and in Flanders.

The turn of the eighteenth century saw a further extension of the arena to include two non-Western powers, Russia and Turkey (though Turkey's admittance into the Western system of international relations was not recognized formally until the negotiation of the Paris peace settlement of 1856, after the Crimean War). The eighteenth century saw the

arena expand still further – into North America in one direction and into India in the other. Finally, in the nineteenth century, the arena became world-wide. First Eastern Asia and then Tropical Africa and Southern Africa were drawn into it. The two world wars were truly world-wide. Each of them was fought not only in Europe but all over the world as well; almost all the sovereign states that were then in existence became belligerents in each war before it ended, and in each war the outcome was eventually decided by the intervention of the United States, which is a non-European power, though not, of course, a non-Western one.

By 1967 the whole surface and whole air-envelope of the globe had been knit together into a unity for purposes of warfare. By this date any point on the earth's surface can be hit more or less accurately by a missile shot from a launching pad at any other point. By this date, too, anything that happens in any part of man's habitat may be a matter of life and death for the rest of the world. For instance, the destinies of the whole world are now involved in the war in Vietnam and in the tension along the armistice lines in the Near East and Kashmir.

There have been a number of momentous changes in the international situation since the last days of the Second World War. The first of these changes has been the invention and use of the atomic weapon. This has been different in kind from any previous "improvements" in military technique, such as the invention of gunpowder. The invention of the atomic weapon has changed the nature of war itself. War has always been wicked and destructive but, before 1945, the liability of a belligerent was usually limited. A defeated belligerent would be mulcted of territory, wealth, and power; it might be conquered and annexed by the victor; but it was rare for the vanquished to be wiped out. The annihilation of Carthage and the Carthaginian people by the Romans was an exceptional atrocity, and even this and other comparable crimes were only local tragedies; they were not threats to the survival of the human race as a whole.

Since 1945, on the other hand, the cost of war, if escalated to the atomic level, has become prohibitive. It seems probable that, in a war fought with atomic weapons, there will be no victor. There will be mutual defeat, and the defeat might take the Carthaginian form of annihilation. Indeed, this fate might engulf the whole human race; for the course taken by both world wars has shown that a war which starts as a local one tends, under modern

technological conditions, to become world-wide, while the history of all wars shows that it was in the very nature of all wars to get out of hand. Even before "the annihilation of distance" by modern technology, most wars had spread and had escalated beyond the expectations and intentions of the war-makers. The invention of the atomic weapon made it evident that war could no longer be used effectively as an instrument of policy. In particular, it became evident that, in the Atomic Age, the world could not be united politically by military force. In the pre-Atomic Age of Western history, each successive attempt to unite the world by conquest had been defeated. In the Atomic Age, any attempt to do this would be a symptom of suicidal mania.

The second of the momentous changes that have been sequels to the Second World War is the reduction of the number of great powers from seven to two – that is, to the number with which the competition had started at the beginning of the modern age, when the powers in the arena were the Hapsburg Monarchy and France. If the United States and the Soviet Union had not been overtaken in 1945 by the Atomic Age, they might have fought each other for the prize of supremacy, as the Hapsburgs and France had done in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. So far America and Russia have refrained from going to war with each other, but they have also failed to come to terms with each other. In consequence, international relations continue to be anarchic. In 1967 the United States and the Soviet Union are both facing the prospect of losing the pre-eminent power that each of them has been enjoying since the overthrow of Nazi Germany. Both powers alike are menaced by the proliferation of the possession of atomic weapons and by the possibility that China, already an atomic power, might raise itself one day to achieve parity with the present Big Two.

Meanwhile, the anarchy in the world has been aggravated by the great increase in the number of sovereign independent states that resulted from the liberation of Asian and African countries which formerly were parts of the British, French, Dutch, Italian, and American colonial empires. Since the close of the Second World War, the number of local sovereign independent states on the face of this comparatively small planet has nearly doubled. There are now about 125 of these, including such tiny entities as Andorra, San Marino, State of Vatican City, and Singapore. The increase in their number has made the

world more difficult to govern. Some of these new states – e.g., India and Pakistan, or, again, the Arab states and Israel – have been at swords' points with one another from birth; and each of these new local feuds is a danger to the maintenance of world peace. Moreover, the doctrine of the equality of states, which had been recognized in 1648 in the Westphalia peace settlement, was written into the constitution of the United Nations and this doctrine puts a premium on political disruption. If, for instance, Nigeria were to break up into five separate fragments, the Nigerians would be rewarded for their political incompetence by getting five seats in the Assembly of the United Nations instead of the one seat allotted to an undisrupted Nigeria – and likewise to an undisrupted India, United States, and Soviet Union. This distribution of seats is unrealistic. It bears no relation to the real ratios of population, wealth, power, and responsibility, and it therefore threatens to bring the Assembly into disrepute. The constitution of a world government could never be built on this fantastically inequitable basis.

In the Atomic Age, the need for the establishment of some kind of world government is still more evident than it has been before. In the Atomic Age, a world government can be established by consent only, not by force, and it would be hard to induce the newly liberated Asian and African states, and even the less recently liberated Latin American states, to agree to the reduction of their voting power to the ratio to which they are properly entitled. On the other· hand, there is one propitious hard fact: by 1967 the postwar power of the United States and of the Soviet Union might be a wasting asset; these two states, out of the officially sovereign 125, still hold, between them, about 90 per cent of the world's power. Since the collapse of Nazi Germany, America and Russia have been frustrating each other. If the rise of Communist China moves them to come to terms with each other and to form a partnership, they would still have it in their power to establish a world government *de facto* by acting in concert. This would not be a democratic world government, but it would be one that would ensure the survival of the human race; for America and Russia, working together, could not only eliminate the possibility of their falling into an atomic war with each other; they could also make it impossible for an atomic war to be made by any other power.

Under the political and psychological conditions prevailing in 1967, a world government is evidently going to be hard to establish. It would be hard enough for the United States and

the Soviet Union to bring themselves to work together –though, by now, the vital interest of each of these two powers calls urgently for cooperation between them. It would be still harder to persuade the other 123 states of the world to reconcile themselves to seeing their sovereignties subordinated to a Russo-American directorate, even if there were a prospect that this undemocratic form of world government would be democratized progressively as time went on. Yet however difficult it might be to achieve world government, it looks in 1967 as if, in the Atomic Age, this has become a necessary condition for the survival of the human race. In the pre-Atomic Age, it was possible for mankind to survive without world government, but the cost of living in this way was a permanent state of international anarchy in which each of the spells of uneasy peace between local sovereign states ended invariably in a fresh outbreak of war between them. At the western end of the Old World, in contrast to China, this miserable state of affairs set in with the breakdown and break-up of the Roman Empire in the fifth century of the Christian Era. From the turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onward, this lamentable Western way of life has spread progressively to the rest of the world. It has partly been imposed on the non-Western majority of mankind by the West European powers' conquests of colonial empires overseas, and has partly been accepted by still independent non-Western states – e.g., by Russia and Japan – under the influence of the West's prestige.

The modern West has had many good things to give to the world in the field of science and technology, but in the field of international relations the effect of the Westernization of the world has been disastrous. It has aggravated international anarchy where this had existed before, and has imported it into regions, such as China and Peru, that had previously achieved a unified government within their own respective domains. Mankind's present major political task is to save itself from self-destruction by erecting some kind of world government in the present unpropitious circumstances. As a start, we could well be content with any arrangement – for instance, a Russo-American joint dictatorship – that would exclude the possibility of an atomic war.

Effectively enforced, law is an indispensable condition for civilized life on the world scale just as much as it is on the municipal scale. But we cannot have effectively enforced law on any geographical scale unless we have an effective government on the same scale. If there

is to be an effectively enforced world law there has to be an effective world government. This is one of the lessons of modern treaties. Of the many lessons latent in such documents, this, in my judgment, is the most valuable lesson of all.