2 The New Agenda: What are the Big Questions Now?

The anomalies that had developed within the post-war European security system by the end of the 1980s were so deep that to address them adequately was to have to rethink security policy from the ground up. This was not just a case of revising national or even alliance strategy. It was a case of managing a transition to an entirely different phase of international relations. Opinions might differ about the pace of change and about the nature of specific steps to be taken, but not, it will be argued here, about the ultimate goal of policy. This was an unprecedented state of affairs.

So far as concerned relations among themselves, the leaders of all 35 CSCE countries (soon to be 34 after the unification of Germany) were being asked to carry Europe safely but purposefully through the age of deterrence, decisively away from the past era of inter-state war and towards a future era of mutually assured security. In the NATO London Declaration of 6 July 1990 this was heralded as an epoch in which the two alliances 'are no longer adversaries'. In the Paris Charter of 20 November 1990 it was described as 'a new era of democracy, peace and cooperation' in Europe.1

So far as the rest of the world went, CSCE governments had to work out how this evolving European 'peace order' could coexist with other regions in which these political, economic and cultural preconditions were missing. Much of the world was still living in an age of war.2

The tension between these two requirements was well illustrated when President Saddam Hussein of Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990. On the one hand the invasion showed how in the Middle East the use or threat of use of military force was still seen to bring political gain. Governments did not subscribe to the principle of border
inviolability. On the other hand the united condemnation of the Iraqi action by all CSCE countries underlined how in Europe the UN/CSCE principle of border inviolability was now said to be universally upheld. The Gulf crisis was described as a ‘critical juncture in history’, a ‘defining moment’ in the evolution of a ‘new world order’. That is to say, superpower collaboration in the United Nations was seen to open the way to the real possibility of the evolution of some kind of future global security system.3

By the beginning of 1991 this programme had reached a critical point. Which paradigm would predominate? Would the remarkable transformation in Europe be further consolidated, and, after the immediate Gulf crisis was resolved, a comparable process be initiated in the Middle East? Or, triggered by upheaval in the Soviet Union, would the kind of unregenerate forces so dramatically exposed in the Gulf subsequently revive in Europe and threaten to drag the continent back to confrontation if not war?

All political leaders in Europe say that the future in Europe must lie in the first of these two directions. To that extent there is overall agreement about ends. But there is continuing profound, and at times bitter, disagreement about means. The disagreement is in the deepest sense political. It concerns the whole nature of the new European order that is emerging from the dissolution of the Yalta system. It involves judgements about the past, assessments of the present and recommendations for the future. The party political debate is complex and varies from country to country. Nevertheless broad patterns can be discerned. Those to the right of the political spectrum in Western European countries tend to begin from one set of assumptions; those to the left from another. As a result they see the problems in different ways and come to different conclusions about what should be done about them. There is comparable debate going on in the Soviet Union.

It is possible to isolate six fundamental questions around which the new security debate now hinges. Five of them are generated by the five anomalies examined in Chapter 1. But there is a prior question which has to be considered first.

1 WHERE DOES THE THREAT TO SECURITY LIE?

The nature of any security policy is conditioned by the nature of the perceived threat or threats that it is there to meet. So the first task is to define where the risk and danger is seen to come from.