‘We are the only unbroken nation that fought against Hitler’s tyranny in the war from start to finish’, Churchill said of Britain’s role in the defeat of Nazi Germany in the Second World War a year after that event. ‘We sought no material gains ... We, and with us the whole Empire and Commonwealth ... drew the sword against the mighty antagonist at the call of honour and in defence of the rights of weaker nations, according to our plighted word, according to the fair play of the world. We did not fight only in the sacred cause of self defence like the Russian[s] ... No one attacked us. We fought for a higher and broader theme. We fought against tyranny, aggression, and broken faith, and in order to establish that rule of law among the nations which alone can be the shield of freedom and progress.’1 There could be no nobler crusade than the one that Britain waged against Nazi Germany, given that the Soviet Communist system, its moral equivalent and one time ally, was the less immediate threat in geopolitical terms. There could be no more glorious way to mark the end of Britain as a Great Power than to lead by example in defiance of the Nazi regime, and then to play her full part in the coalition with the Americans and with Stalin’s Russia that destroyed Hitler’s regime and its Axis allies. This Unholy Alliance had served its purpose so admirably that, for a time, there were those in the West, mainly Americans, who believed that it could persist and form the cornerstone of the United Nations Organization and, thus, of a lasting peace. There were some in the West who wanted the Soviet Union to become the predominant power in the world in the name of socialism, and who worked to achieve that goal. The ideological divide between Soviet Communism and Western liberal democracy, though, was of an order that guaranteed conflict, which the development of nuclear weapons
ensured took the form of the Cold War, the continuation of the Second World War by other means with, once more, Britain heavily engaged from the outset.

‘There are three circles which are linked together: the circle of the British Empire and Commonwealth, the circle of the English speaking world, and the circle of united Europe’, Churchill declared on 20 April 1949, thus defining the context within which he believed British post war foreign policy should be conducted. This Churchillian vision had the attraction for those conducting that foreign policy that Britain was perceived as having a crucial role to play in each of the interrelated circles that comprised the Western world, and such was Churchill’s stature as a world statesman that his views commanded attention in international politics even when he was not the British Prime Minister. Churchill’s ‘three circles’ declaration represented a synthesis of his most important previous post war pronouncements, especially his Fulton Speech of 5 March 1946 about the Sinews of Peace and his Zurich Speech of 19 September 1946 about the Tragedy of Europe. In his Fulton Speech, on the basis that ‘last time I saw it all coming and cried aloud to my fellow countrymen and to the world, but no one paid any attention’, Churchill had led the way in warning the West that Soviet Communism constituted ‘a growing challenge and peril to Christian civilization’, and, unlike the mealy mouthed, he did not hesitate to draw the parallel with the rise of Nazi Germany. ‘From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an Iron Curtain has descended across the Continent’, Churchill declared. ‘Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow ... The Communist parties, which were very small in all these Eastern States of Europe, have been raised to pre-eminence and power far beyond their numbers and are seeking everywhere to obtain totalitarian control. Police governments are prevailing in nearly every case, and so far, except in Czechoslovakia, there is no true democracy ... this is not the liberated Europe we fought to build up. Nor is it one which contains the essentials of permanent peace.’

Churchill argued that, since it was from ‘the quarrels of the strong parent races in Europe that the World Wars ... have sprung’, it followed that ‘the safety of the world requires a new unity in Europe’, and in his Zurich Speech he developed this theme. ‘The first step in the