

**( CHAPTER 1 )**  

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**THE SOVIET PEOPLE AND**  

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**STALIN BETWEEN WAR**  

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**AND PEACE, 1945**



Roosevelt believed that Russians would come and bow down to America and beg, since Russia is a poor country, without industry, without bread. But we looked at it differently.

For the people were ready for sacrifice and struggle.

—Molotov, June 1976

We are guided not by emotions, but by reason,  
analysis, and calculation.

—Stalin, January 9, 1945

On the morning of June 24, 1945, rain was pouring down on Red Square, but tens of thousands of elite Soviet troops hardly noticed it. They stood at attention, ready to march through the square to celebrate their triumph over the Third Reich. At precisely ten o'clock, Marshal Georgy Zhukov emerged from the Kremlin's gates riding a white stallion and gave the signal for the Parade of Victory to begin. At the peak of the celebration, the medal-bedecked officers hurled two hundred captured German banners onto the pedestal of Lenin's Mausoleum. The pomp and circumstance of the parade was impressive but misleading. Despite its victory, the Soviet Union was an exhausted giant. "Stalin's empire was won with reservoirs of Soviet blood," concludes British historian Richard Overy.<sup>1</sup> Just how much blood is still debated by military historians and demographers. Contrary to common Western perceptions, Soviet human reserves were not limitless; by the end of World War II, the Soviet army was no less desperate for human material than was the German army. No wonder Soviet leadership and experts were precise in calculating the damage to Soviet property during the Nazi invasion but were afraid of revealing the real numbers of human casualties. In February 1946, Stalin said that the USSR had lost seven million. In 1961, Nikita Khrushchev "upgraded" the number to twenty million. Since 1990, after the official investigation, the count of human losses has risen to 26.6 million, including 8,668,400 uniformed personnel. Yet even this number is open to debate, with some Russian

scholars claiming the tally to be incomplete.<sup>2</sup> In retrospect, the Soviet Union won a Pyrrhic victory over Nazi Germany.

Enormous combat and civilian losses resulted from the Nazi invasion and atrocities as well as from the total war methods practiced by the Soviet political and military leadership. An appalling indifference to human life marked Soviet conduct of the war from beginning to end. By contrast, the total American human losses in two theaters, European and Pacific, did not exceed 293,000.

The evidence made available after the collapse of the Soviet Union corroborates early American intelligence estimates of Soviet economic weakness.<sup>3</sup> The official estimate set the total damage at 679 billion rubles. This figure, according to this estimate, “surpasses the national wealth of England or Germany and constitutes one third of the overall national wealth of the United States.” As with human losses, the estimates of material damage were equally huge. Later Soviet calculations assessed the cost of the war at 2.6 trillion rubles.<sup>4</sup>

New evidence reveals that the vast majority of Soviet functionaries and people did not want conflict with the West and preferred to focus on peaceful reconstruction. Yet, as we know, after the end of World War II, Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe was brutal and uncompromising. In the Middle East and the Far East, the Soviet Union pushed hard for bases, oil concessions, and spheres of influence. All this, along with ideological rhetoric, gradually brought Moscow into confrontation with the United States and Great Britain. How could such an exhausted and ruined country stand up to the West? What domestic and external factors accounted for the Soviet Union’s international behavior? What were Stalin’s goals and strategies?

### TRIUMPH AND HANGOVER

The war against the Nazis had a liberating effect on the Soviet public.<sup>5</sup> During the 1930s, indiscriminate state terror had constantly blurred boundaries between good and evil—an individual could be a “Soviet man or woman” today and an “enemy of the people” tomorrow. Social paralysis, the result of the great terror of the 1930s, was gone in the crucible of war, and many people again began to think and act independently. In the trenches, people forged bonds of camaraderie and trusted each other again. As in European countries during World War I, the “front generation” or “generation of victors” emerged in the USSR during the Great Patriotic War. Those who belonged to this community satisfied the need for friendship, solidarity, and cooperation that was often lacking at home. For some, it remained the most important experience of their lives.<sup>6</sup>

The war had other profound effects as well. Official ineptitude, blunders, sel-

fishness, and lies during the great Soviet retreat of 1941–42 undermined the authority of state and party institutions and many officials. The liberation of Eastern Europe allowed millions of people to break out of the xenophobic Soviet environment and see other lands for the first time. The war sacrifices validated idealism and romanticism among the best representatives of the young Soviet intelligentsia who volunteered to join the army. The spirit of a just war against Nazism and their experiences abroad pushed them to dream about a political and cultural liberalization. The alliance between the Soviet Union and Western democracies seemed to create a possibility for the introduction of civil freedoms and human rights.<sup>7</sup> Even established figures with few illusions shared this dream. In a conversation with journalist Ilya Ehrenburg, writer Alexei Tolstoy wondered: “What will be after the war? People are no longer the same.” In the 1960s, Anastas Mikoyan, a member of Stalin’s close circle, recalled that millions of Soviet people who returned home from the West “became different people, with a wider horizon and different demands.” There was an omnipresent new sense that one deserved a better bargain from the regime.<sup>8</sup>

In 1945, some educated, high-minded officers in the Soviet army felt like the Decembrists. (The best young Russian officers had returned to Russia from the war against Napoleon imbued with political liberalism and later became the “Decembrists,” the organizers of military insurrection against the autocracy.) One of them recalled: “It seemed to me that the Great Patriotic War would inevitably be followed by a vigorous social and literary revival—like after the war of 1812, and I was in a hurry to take part in this revival.” The young war veterans expected the state to reward them for their suffering and sacrifices “with greater trust and increased rights of participation, not just free bus passes.” Among them were future freethinkers, who would participate in the social and cultural Thaw after Stalin’s death and would ultimately support the reforms of Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>9</sup>

The war experience shaped the Soviet people’s national identities like no event since the Russian Revolution. This especially affected ethnic Russians, whose national self-awareness had been rather weak in comparison to other ethnic groups of the USSR.<sup>10</sup> After the mid-1930s, Russians formed the bulk of the recruits into the party and state bureaucracies, and Russian history became the backbone of a new official doctrine of patriotism. Films, fiction, and history books presented the USSR as the successor to Imperial Russia. Princes and czars, the “gatherers” of the great empire, took the place of the “international proletariat” in the pantheon of heroes. But it was the German invasion that gave Russians a new feeling of national unity.<sup>11</sup> Nikolai Inozemtsev, an artillery intelligence sergeant and future director of the Institute for World Economy and

International Relations, wrote in his diary in July 1944: "Russians are the most talented, gifted nation in the world, with boundless capacities. Russia is the best country in the world, despite all our shortcomings and deviations." And on Victory Day, he wrote: "All our hearts are overflowing with pride and joy: 'We, Russians, can do anything!' Now, the whole world knows it. And this is the best guarantee of our security in the future."<sup>12</sup>

The war also showed the ugly and repressed sides of the Soviet army. Stalinism victimized the Soviet people, but it also drained their reservoirs of decency. Many recruits in the Soviet army had grown up as street rabble, as children of slums, who never acquired the habits of civilized urban life.<sup>13</sup> When millions of Soviet officers and soldiers crossed the boundaries of Hungary, Rumania, and the Third Reich, some of them lost their moral clarity in the frenzy of marauding, drinking, property destruction, murder of civilians, and rape. Ferocious and repeated waves of the troops' violence against civilians and property swept through the rest of Germany and Austria.<sup>14</sup> Soviet military journalist Grigory Pomerants was shocked at the end of the war by "the ugly things committed by heroes who had walked through the fire from Stalingrad to Berlin." If only the Russian people had had the same energy to demand civil rights!<sup>15</sup>

New Russo-centric patriotism bred a sense of superiority and justified brutality. The Battle of Berlin became the cornerstone of the new Russian sense of greatness.<sup>16</sup> The new victory mythology repressed memories of the last-minute carnage (unnecessary from a military standpoint) and the brutality toward civilians. And Stalin's cult became a mass phenomenon, widely accepted by millions of Russians and non-Russians alike. A war veteran and writer, Viktor Nekrasov, recalled: "The victors are above judgment. We had forgiven Stalin all his misdeeds!"<sup>17</sup> For decades, millions of war veterans have celebrated Victory Day as a national holiday, and many of them drink to Stalin as their victorious war leader.

In real life, the positive and negative effects of war blurred and mingled. Trophy trinkets, clothing, watches, and other loot brought home from Europe had the same effect as American Lend-Lease products—they increased awareness among the Russian military and workers and members of their families that they did not live in the best possible world, contrary to state propaganda.<sup>18</sup> The same war veterans who looted and harassed European civilians openly began snubbing NKVD and SMERSH officials, the much-feared branches of secret police. Some of them challenged official propagandists in public and would not be silenced at party meetings. According to numerous reports, officers and soldiers clashed with local authorities and even distributed leaflets calling for the "overthrow of the power of injustice." SMERSH reported that some officers grumbled that "this socialist brothel should be blown up to hell." This mood was

especially pronounced among Soviet troops stationed in Austria, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia.<sup>19</sup>

The rebellious mood never turned into a rebellion. After the extreme exertions of war had passed, the majority of veterans sank into a social stupor and tried to adapt themselves to everyday life. Pomerants recalls how "many demobilized soldiers and officers lost in the fall of 1946 the strength of their will and became like milksops." In postwar life, he concludes, "all of us with our decorations, medals and citations—became nothing." In the countryside, in small towns, and in urban slums, many became drunkards, loafers, and thieves. In Moscow, Leningrad, and other major cities, potential young leaders among veterans discovered that a party career was the only path for their social and political aspirations. Some took this career path. Many more found their escape route through intense education, but also in the attractions of young life—in romantic affairs and entertainment.<sup>20</sup>

Passivity resulted, to a great extent, from the shock and exhaustion many veterans felt after returning home. Soon after demobilization from the army, Alexander Yakovlev, a future party apparatchik and Gorbachev supporter, was standing at the train station of his hometown observing cars carrying Soviet POWs from German camps to Soviet camps in Siberia when he suddenly began to notice other harsh realities of Soviet life—starving children, the confiscation of grain from peasants, and the prison sentences for minor violations. "It became increasingly obvious that everybody lied," he recalled, referring to the public triumphalism after the war.<sup>21</sup> Another veteran, future philosopher Alexander Zinoviev, recalled: "The situation in the country turned out to be much worse than we imagined it based on rumors, living [with the occupying Soviet army abroad] in fabulous well-being. The war drained the country to the core."<sup>22</sup> The war took an especially heavy toll on the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belorussian countrysides: some regions lost more than half their "collective farmers," mostly males.<sup>23</sup>

In contrast to American GIs, who generally found prosperity and returned to family life at home, Soviet war veterans came home to countless tragedies of ruined lives, the suffering of crippled and maimed people, and the broken lives of millions of widows and orphaned children. There were almost two million officially recognized "invalids" with physical and mental handicaps. Even seemingly healthy veterans collapsed from inexplicable diseases, and hospitals were overwhelmed with young patients.<sup>24</sup>

The Soviet people yearned for peace and stability after the war. A sense of fatigue with war and military values settled into Soviet urban and peasant society. Gone was the jingoism and romantic patriotism that had inspired young, espe-

cially educated, men and women in the late 1930s.<sup>25</sup> At the same time, the culture of xenophobia and the Stalinist myth of hostile encirclement remained entrenched in the masses. Average citizens tended to believe the official propaganda that blamed the lack of immediate improvement and the unsatisfactory results of the war on the Western allies. Most importantly, the Soviet people lacked energy and institutions to continue with the “creeping de-Stalinization” begun during the Great Patriotic War. Many of them revered Stalin more than ever as a great leader.<sup>26</sup> Russian people in particular failed to transform their amazing national awakening during the war into a culture of individual self-esteem and autonomous civic action. For large groups of Russian society, the victory in World War II became forever linked to the notion of great power, collective glory, and ritualistic mourning for the dead.<sup>27</sup> As the Cold War began, these moods of the masses became useful for Stalin. They helped him to carry out his foreign policy and to stamp out potential discontent and dissent at home.

#### TEMPTATIONS OF “SOCIALIST IMPERIALISM”

The Soviet elites felt that the victory was the product of their collective efforts, not just of Stalin’s leadership. On May 24, 1945, at a sumptuous Kremlin banquet to honor the commanders of the Red Army, this mood was almost palpable, and Stalin seemed to bow to it. Pavel Sudoplatov, NKVD operative and organizer of the guerrilla movement during the war, recalled: “He looked at us, young generals and admirals, as the generation he had raised, his children and his heirs.” Would Stalin consent to govern the country together with the new ruling class (the *nomenklatura*) just as he had learned to rely on it during the war?<sup>28</sup>

At the same time, the victory and the unprecedented advance of Soviet power into the heart of Europe strengthened the bond between the elites and Stalin. Mikoyan recalled his feeling of joy at the comradesly partnership that reemerged around Stalin during the war. He firmly believed that the murderous purges of the 1930s would not return. “Once again,” he recalled, those who worked with Stalin had friendly feelings toward him and trusted in his judgment. The same feelings were shared by thousands of other military, political, and economic officials.<sup>29</sup> The Russian and Russified majority within the civilian and military bureaucracies revered Stalin not only as the war leader but also as a national leader. During the wartime, the term *derzhava* (“great power”) entered the official lexicon. Films and novels glorified Russian princes and czars who had built a strong Russian state in the face of external and domestic enemies. At the same banquet that Sudoplatov described, Stalin raised a toast “to the health of the Russian people.” Stalin praised Russians for their unmatched patience and loy-

alty to his regime. Displaying “clear mind, staunch character and patience,” the Russian people made great sacrifices, thus becoming “the decisive force that ensured the historic victory.”<sup>30</sup> Thus, instead of elevating all Soviet officials, Stalin put Russians first.

Russification campaigns took place in the new Soviet borderlands, especially in the Baltics and Ukraine. This meant more than a cultural pressure; in practice, it saw the forced deportation of hundreds of thousands of Latvians, Lithuanians, Estonians, and West Ukrainians to Siberia and Kazakhstan. Tens of thousands of migrants from Russia, White Russia, and the Russian-speaking East Ukraine took over their houses. The secret police and the restored Orthodox Church with the Patriarchate under state control moved to wrest the borderland Catholic churches, as well as the Ukrainian Uniate parishes of the Eastern rite, which submitted to papal authority, from the Vatican’s control.<sup>31</sup>

Russians got promoted within the most crucial and sensitive segments of the state apparatus, replacing non-Russians, especially Jews. Stalin’s apparatus discovered during the war, as Yuri Slezkine put it, that “Jews as a Soviet nationality were now an ethnic diaspora” with too many connections abroad. This also meant that the Soviet intelligentsia, in which Jews were the largest group, “was not really Russian—and thus not fully Soviet.” Even before the Soviet troops discovered the Nazi extermination camps in Poland, the chief of Soviet propaganda, Alexander Scherbakov, on Stalin’s order, launched a secret campaign to “purify” the party and the state from the Jews. Information on Jewish heroism in the war, as well as the horrible evidence of the Holocaust, remained suppressed. Many Soviet citizens began to look at Jews as those who were the first to flee from the enemy to the rear and the last to go to the front. Grassroots anti-Semitism spread like fire, now encouraged and abetted by officialdom. After the war, the planned purge of Jews in the state apparatus quickly spread to all Soviet institutions.<sup>32</sup>

The manipulation of traditional symbols and institutions and the rise of official anti-Semitism carried significant long-term risks for the Stalinist state. Russians praised the great leader, but Ukrainians and other nationalities felt slighted and even offended. Many officials and public figures, Jews and non-Jews, found the state anti-Semitism a huge blow to their faith in Communist “internationalism.” Fissures and crevasses would open in the core of Soviet bureaucracies as a result of Stalin’s manipulation of nationalist emotions, but that would only be discovered much later.<sup>33</sup>

Another common bond between the Kremlin leader and the Soviet elites stemmed from their great power chauvinism and expansionist mood. After the victory at Stalingrad, the Soviet Union assumed a leading role in the coalition of great powers, and this fact had an intoxicating effect on many members of the

Soviet nomenklatura. Even Old Bolsheviks like Ivan Maisky and Maxim Litvinov began to talk in the language of imperialist expansion, planning to create Soviet spheres of influence and to gain access to strategic sea routes. In January 1944, Maisky wrote to Stalin and Vyacheslav Molotov, commissar for foreign affairs, that the USSR must position itself in such a way after the war as to make it "unthinkable" for any combination of states in Europe and Asia to pose a challenge to Soviet security. Maisky suggested annexation of Southern Sakhalin and Kurile Islands from Japan. He also proposed that the USSR should have "a sufficient number of military, air, and naval bases" in Finland and Rumania, as well as strategic access routes to the Persian Gulf via Iran.<sup>34</sup> In November 1944, Litvinov sent a memo to Stalin and Molotov that the postwar Soviet sphere of influence in Europe (without specifying the nature of that "influence") should include Finland, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, "the Slav counties of the Balkan peninsula, and Turkey as well." In June and July 1945, Litvinov argued that the USSR should penetrate into such traditional zones of British influence as the zone of the Suez Canal, Syria, Libya, and Palestine.<sup>35</sup>

The former general secretary of the Comintern, now the head of the new party's department for international information, Georgy Dimitrov, regarded the Red Army as a more important tool of history than are revolutionary movements. In late July 1945, when Stalin and Molotov negotiated with Western leaders in Potsdam, Dimitrov and his deputy, Alexander Panyushkin, wrote to them: "The countries of the Middle East acquire increasing importance in the current international situation and urgently need our intense attention. We should actively study the situation in those countries and take certain measures in the interests of our state."<sup>36</sup>

The spirit of "socialist imperialism" among Soviet officials overlapped with Stalin's intentions and ambitions. The Kremlin leader would take advantage of this spirit, as he would continue after the war to build up the Soviet Union as a military superpower.

Stalin's rhetoric that all Slavs must be unified against the resurrection of a future German threat found enormous appeal among the majority of Soviet officials. When the minister of tank industry, Vyacheslav Malyshev, heard Stalin in March 1945 talking about "new Slavophile-Leninists," he wrote enthusiastically in his diary of "a whole program for years ahead." Among Moscow officials, a new version of the prerevolutionary Pan Slavism was spreading fast. Russian general Alexander Gundorov, the head of the state-sponsored All-Slav Committee, planned to convene the first Congress of Slavs early in 1946, assuring the Politburo that there was already in existence the mass "new movement of the Slavs." Leonid Baranov, supervisor of the All-Slav Committee in the central party

apparatus, defined the Russian people as the senior brothers of the Poles. Molotov, to the end of his days, saw the Russians as the only people with "some inner feeling" for doing things "large scale." Among many Russian officials, the distinction between the expansion of Soviet borders and influence for ideological and security reasons and the traditional Russian big-power chauvinism became increasingly blurred.<sup>37</sup>

For many military commanders and other high officials from the Soviet Union in occupied Europe, imperialism was a matter of self-interest. They cast aside the Bolshevik code of modesty and aversion to property and acted like Spanish conquistadores, accumulating war booty. Marshal Georgy Zhukov turned his homes in Russia into museums of rare china and furs, paintings, velvet, gold, and silk. Air Marshal Alexander Golovanov dismantled Joseph Goebbels's country villa and flew it to Russia. SMERSH general Ivan Serov plundered a treasure trove that allegedly included the crown of the king of Belgium.<sup>38</sup> Other Soviet marshals, generals, and secret police chiefs sent home plane-loads of lingerie, cutlery, and furniture, but also gold, antiques, and paintings. In the first chaotic months, the Soviets, mostly commanders and officials, sent 100,000 railcars of various "construction materials" and "household goods" from Germany. Among them were 60,000 pianos, 459,000 radios, 188,000 carpets, almost a million "pieces of furniture," 264,000 wall clocks and standing clocks, 6,000 railcars with paper, 588 railcars with china and other tableware, 3.3 million pairs of shoes, 1.2 million coats, 1 million hats, and 7.1 million coats, dresses, shirts, and items of underwear. For the Soviets, Germany was a giant shopping mall where they did not pay for anything.<sup>39</sup>

Even for less rapacious officials, the enormity of Soviet war suffering and casualties justified postwar reparations from Germany and its satellites. Ivan Maisky, the head of the Soviet task force on war reparations, wrote in his diary while traveling through Russia and Ukraine to the Yalta Conference in February 1945: "The signs of war along the entire road: destroyed buildings left and right, emasculated rails, burnt villages, broken water pipes, brick rubble, exploded bridges." Maisky referred to the suffering of the Soviet people as an argument for higher reparations and the shipping of German industrial equipment to the Soviet Union.<sup>40</sup> One could also hear an argument that Soviet losses justified postwar imperialism and expansionism. In Leningrad, the secret police informers reported a philosophy professor saying: "I am not a chauvinist, but the issue of Polish territory, and the issue of our relations with neighbors concern me greatly after the casualties that we endured." Later this thesis would become a popular justification for Soviet domination in Eastern Europe and territorial demands on neighboring countries.<sup>41</sup>

Historian Yuri Slezkine compared Stalin's Soviet Union to a "communal apartment," with all major ("title") nationalities in possession of separate "rooms," but with common "shared facilities," including the army, security, and foreign policy.<sup>42</sup> Yet, just as the inhabitants of real Soviet communal flats harbored their own particularist interests behind expressed loyalty to the collectivist ethos, so did the leadership of the republics. In practice, they saw the victory in World War I as the moment to expand their borders at the expense of neighbors. Soviet officials from Ukraine, White Russia, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan also developed an imperialist itch mixed with nationalist aspirations. Ukrainian party officials were the most numerous and important group in the nomenklatura after the Russians. They rejoiced at the fact that in 1939, after the Nazi-Soviet pact, Western Ukraine became part of the USSR. In 1945, Stalin annexed the territories of Ruthenia and Bukovina from Hungary and Slovakia and attached them as well to Soviet Ukraine. Despite many terrible crimes perpetrated by the Communist regime against the Ukrainian people, Ukrainian Communist officials now worshipped Stalin as the gatherer of Ukrainian lands. Stalin deliberately cultivated this sentiment. Once, looking at the postwar Soviet map in the presence of Russian and non-Russian officials, Stalin cited with satisfaction that he "returned historic lands," once under foreign rule, to Ukraine and Belarus.<sup>43</sup>

Armenian, Azeri, and Georgian officials could not act as nationalist lobbies. But they could promote their agendas as part of building the great Soviet power. After Soviet armies reached the western borders of the USSR and accomplished the "reunification" of Ukraine and Belorussia, officials of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan began to think aloud about a chance to regain "ancestral lands" that belonged to Turkey and Iran and to reunite with their ethnic brethren living in those territories. Molotov recalled, during the 1970s, that in 1945 the leaders of Soviet Azerbaijan "wanted to double the territory of their Republic at the expense of Iran. We also made an attempt to claim a region to the south of Batum, because this Turkish territory was once populated by Georgians. The Azeris wanted to seize the Azeri part and the Georgians claimed a Georgian part. And we wanted to give Ararat back to the Armenians."<sup>44</sup> Archival evidence reveals a synergy between Stalin's strategic goals and the nationalist aspirations of Communist apparatchiks from the South Caucasus (see chapter 2).

The fact that the acquisition of new territories and spheres of influence evoked the demons of expansionism and nationalism among Soviet officials, Russian and non-Russian alike, provided Stalin's project of a postwar Pax Sovietica with the energy it required. As long as party and state elites coveted territories of neighboring countries and participated in the looting of Germany, it was easier

for Stalin to control them. The imperial project absorbed forces that otherwise might have worked against the Stalinist regime.

## THE SOVIETS AND THE UNITED STATES

Hitler's attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941, and the Japanese attack on the United States on December 7, 1941, brought the two nations together for the first time. The Soviets gained a powerful and resourceful ally. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and the New Dealers became Stalin's strategic partners in the Grand Alliance against the Axis powers, probably the most generous ones he would ever have. Even as the Nazis were advancing to the banks of the Volga, Roosevelt invited the Soviets to become co-organizers of the postwar security community. The American president told Molotov in Washington in negotiations in late May 1942 that "it would be necessary to create an international police force" in order to prevent war "in the next 25–30 years." After the war, Roosevelt continued, "the victors—the US, England, the USSR, must keep their armaments." Germany and its satellites, Japan, France, Italy, Rumania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, "must be disarmed." Roosevelt's "four policemen," the United States, the United Kingdom, the USSR, and China, "will have to preserve peace by force." This unusual offer took Molotov by surprise, but after two days Stalin instructed him to "announce to Roosevelt without delay" that he was absolutely correct. In his summary of the Soviet-American talks of 1942, Stalin highlighted "an agreement with Roosevelt on the establishment after the war of an international military force to prevent aggression."<sup>45</sup>

In order to avoid publicity and criticism from anti-Soviet conservatives, Roosevelt, his confidant Harry Hopkins, and other New Dealers maintained formal and informal channels of communication with the Kremlin. Later, their unusual frankness led to claims that some New Dealers (perhaps even Hopkins) were, de facto, Soviet agents of influence.<sup>46</sup> This "transparency" of the U.S. administration and Roosevelt's marked friendliness to the Soviets at the Tehran Conference (November 28–December 1, 1943) and especially at the Yalta Conference (February 4–12, 1945) seemed to reveal his desire to secure a lasting partnership after the war.

Soviet officials, representatives of various bureaucratic elites, developed confusing, often contradictory attitudes toward the American ally. The United States had long evoked respect and admiration from Soviet technology-minded elites, who since the 1920s had vowed to turn Russia into "a new and more splendid America." Taylorism and Fordism (after Frederick Taylor and Henry Ford, the

leading theorists and practitioners of organized production technologies) were household terms among Soviet industrial managers and engineers.<sup>47</sup> Stalin himself urged Soviet cadres in the mid-1920s to combine “Russian revolutionary scale” with the “American business approach.” During the industrialization drive of 1928–36, hundreds of Red directors and engineers, including Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan, traveled to the United States to learn about mass production and management of modern industries, including machine building, metallurgy, meat processing, the dairy industry, and more. The Soviets imported American know-how wholesale, including entire technologies for ice cream, hot dogs, soft drinks, and large department stores (modeled after Macy’s).<sup>48</sup>

The wartime contacts and especially Lend-Lease deliveries confirmed widespread perceptions of the United States as the country possessing exceptional economic-technological power.<sup>49</sup> In his circle, even Stalin acknowledged that if the Americans and the British “had not helped us with Lend-Lease, we would not have been able to cope with Germany, because we lost too much” in 1941–42.<sup>50</sup> Most of the clothing and other consumer goods intended for civilians got appropriated by bureaucrats. What little remained trickled down to grateful recipients. Wartime propaganda programs and Lend-Lease also provided entry into Soviet society for American cultural influences. Hollywood films, including *Casablanca*, became available to high officials and their families. At the U.S. Embassy, George Kennan, skeptical about the West’s ability to influence Russia, admitted that the amount of goodwill that film screenings generated “cannot be overestimated.”<sup>51</sup> Between 1941 and 1945, thousands of Soviet officials in the military, trade representatives, and intelligence operators crisscrossed the United States. The dynamism and scale of the American way of life evoked among the visitors a contradictory range of feelings: ideological hostility, fascination, bewilderment, and envy. Soviet visitors remembered their American trips for decades afterward and shared their impressions with children and relatives.<sup>52</sup>

At the same time, the cultural and ideological views of Soviet elites shaped their perceptions of America and Americans. Very few, even senior, Soviet officials understood how the U.S. government and society functioned. The Soviet ambassador to the United States, Alexander Troyanovsky, who had also served as ambassador in Tokyo, expressed his bewilderment that, “while Japan could be compared to the piano, the United States was an entire symphony orchestra.”<sup>53</sup> The vast majority of Soviet officials grew up in a xenophobic and isolationist environment. They spoke Soviet “newspeak”—untranslatable into any other language.<sup>54</sup> Some Soviet functionaries felt that upper-class Americans treated them, at best, with condescension, from a position of material and cultural superiority. Marshal Fedor Golikov, the head of Soviet military intelligence (GRU), who led

the military mission to the United States, was infuriated by Harry Hopkins, Roosevelt’s assistant and one of the staunchest supporters of the U.S.-Soviet partnership. Golikov described him in his journal as “the Pharisee without constraints,” “the big person’s lackey,” who decided that “we, the people of the Soviet state, must comport in his presence as beggars, must wait patiently and express gratitude for the crumbs from the lord’s table.” Much later, Molotov expressed similar feelings about FDR himself: “Roosevelt believed that Russians would come and bow down to America, would humbly beg, since [Russia] is a poor country, without industry, without bread—so they had no other option. But we looked at it differently. Our people were ready for sacrifice and struggle.”<sup>55</sup>

Many Soviet bureaucrats and the military remained convinced, despite the aid shipped across the North Atlantic to the USSR, that the United States was deliberately delaying its own offensives in Europe until the Russians had killed most of the German army, and perhaps vice versa.<sup>56</sup> Soviet elites understood American assistance as payback for the enormous Soviet war contribution; for that reason they never bothered to express their gratitude and show reciprocity to their American allies, a cause of immense irritation to the Americans who dealt with them. In January 1945, Molotov surprised some Americans and outraged others when he presented an official request for American loans that sounded more like a demand than a request for a favor. This was, as it turned out, another case when Molotov refused “to beg for the crumbs from the lord’s table.” There was also the conviction in Soviet high circles that it would be in American interests to give loans to Russia as a medicine against the unavoidable postwar slump. Soviet intelligence operatives sought out American industrial and technological secrets, aided by a host of idealistic sympathizers. The Soviets acted like guests who, even as they were given lavish help and hospitality, unceremoniously helped themselves to the hosts’ prize jewels.<sup>57</sup>

Roosevelt’s policy of treating the USSR as an equal partner and great power spoiled Soviet officialdom. In late 1944, Stalin asked Roosevelt to agree to the restoration of the “former rights of Russia violated by the treacherous attack of Japan in 1904.”<sup>58</sup> Roosevelt gave his blessing and did not even insist on a detailed understanding. Stalin remarked to Andrei Gromyko, Soviet ambassador to the United States, with satisfaction: “America has taken the correct stand. It is important from the viewpoint of our future relations with the United States.”<sup>59</sup> Many in Moscow expected similar indulgence of Soviet plans in Eastern Europe. At the end of 1944, Soviet intelligence chiefs concluded that “neither the Americans, nor the British had a clear policy with regard to the postwar future of the [Eastern European] countries.”<sup>60</sup>

Most Soviet officials believed that U.S.-Soviet cooperation, despite possible

problems, would continue after the war. Gromyko concluded in July 1944 that, "in spite of all possible difficulties that are likely to emerge from time to time in our relations with the United States, there are certainly conditions for continuation of cooperation between our two countries in the postwar period."<sup>61</sup> Litvinov saw it as a major task of postwar Soviet foreign policy "to prevent the emergence of a bloc of Great Britain and the USA against the Soviet Union." He envisaged the possibility of "amicable agreement" between London and Moscow, as the United States retreated from Europe. And Molotov himself thought so at the time: "It was profitable to us to preserve our alliance with America. It was important."<sup>62</sup>

The data is very spotty on what thousands of Soviet elites and millions of citizens thought at that time. In 1945, however, Soviet newspapers and central authorities received many letters with a question: "Will the United States help us after the war, too?"<sup>63</sup>

The Yalta Conference became, with Roosevelt's assistance, a crowning victory of Stalin's statesmanship. Waves of optimism swept through Soviet bureaucracies from the top to the bottom. A memorandum on Yalta's results circulated by the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs among Soviet diplomats abroad read: "There was a palpable search for compromise on disputed issues. We assess the conference as a highly positive fact, particularly on Polish and Yugoslav issues, and on the issue of reparations." The Americans even refrained from competing with the Soviets in April 1945 for Berlin. Stalin privately praised the "chivalry" of General Dwight Eisenhower, the Allied commander in Europe, in that matter.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, Roosevelt died just at the time when his suspicions of Soviet intentions began to clash with his desire for postwar cooperation. FDR was outraged by the news about Soviet occupation methods in Eastern Europe and had an angry exchange with Stalin over the so-called Bern incident.<sup>65</sup> The president's sudden death on April 12, 1945, caught the Kremlin by complete surprise. Signing his condolences in the book of visitors at the American residence, Spaso House, in Moscow, Molotov "seemed deeply moved and disturbed." Even Stalin, concludes one of his biographers, felt upset by FDR's passing.<sup>66</sup> The great and familiar partner in war, and possibly in peace, was gone. The new president, Harry S. Truman, was an unknown quantity, and some words from the Missouri politician grated on Soviet ears. This concern explains Molotov's reaction to his first stormy encounter with Truman on April 23, 1945. Truman accused the Soviets of violating Yalta agreements on Poland and broke off the meeting without even waiting for Molotov's rebuttal. The shaken and distressed Molotov spent long hours at the Soviet embassy in Washington writing a cable to Stalin with a report of the meeting. Gromyko, who was present at the meeting, believed that Molotov

"feared that Stalin might make him a scapegoat in this business." In the end, Molotov decided to let the episode pass unnoticed: his record of the conversation with Truman bore no trace of the president's pugnacity and Molotov's ignominious exit.<sup>67</sup>

Soon Soviet intelligence officers in the United States began to report on the dangerous shift in attitudes toward the Soviet Union in Washington. They knew that many groups there, especially Catholic and labor organizations, not to mention the wide array of anti-New Deal organizations in both political parties, had remained viscerally anti-Communist and anti-Soviet during the Grand Alliance. These groups were eager to break any ties with the Soviet Union. Some military commanders (Major General Curtis Le May, General George Patton, and others) openly talked about "finishing the Reds" after defeating "the Krauts" and "the Japs."<sup>68</sup>

The first alarm rang sonorously in Moscow in late April 1945 when the Truman administration abruptly and without notice terminated Lend-Lease deliveries to the USSR. The resulting loss of supplies in the amount of 381 million U.S. dollars was a serious blow to the overstrained Soviet economy. The State Defense Committee (GKO), the state organ that replaced the Party Politburo during the war, decided to appropriate 113 million dollars from the gold reserves to make up for the missing parts and materials.<sup>69</sup> After protests from Moscow, the United States resumed Lend-Lease deliveries, citing a bureaucratic misunderstanding, but this did not allay Soviet suspicions. Soviet representatives in the United States and many officials in Moscow reacted with restrained indignation; they unanimously regarded this episode as an attempt to apply political pressure on the USSR. Molotov's stern instructions to the Soviet ambassador did not conceal his anger. "Do not barge in with pitiful requests. If the U.S. wants to cut off the deliveries, it will be all the worse for them." Emotions in this instance fed unilateralist policies—the Kremlin's penchant to rely only on its own forces.<sup>70</sup>

In late May, the chief of the People's Commissariat for State Security (the NKGB, successor to the NKVD) intelligence station in New York cabled Moscow that "economic circles" that had had no influence on Roosevelt's foreign policy were undertaking "an organized effort to bring about a change in the policy of the [United States] toward the USSR." From American "friends," Communists, and sympathizers, the NKGB learned that Truman was maintaining friendly relations with "extreme reactionaries" in the U.S. Senate, such as Senators Robert Taft, Burton K. Wheeler, Alben Barkley, and others. The cable reported that "the reactionaries are setting particular hopes on the possibility of getting direction of the [United States'] foreign policy wholly into their own hands, partly because [Truman] is notoriously untried and ill-informed on those matters." The mes-



sage concluded: "As a result of [Truman's] succession to power a considerable change in the foreign policy of [the United States] should be expected, first and foremost in relation to the USSR."<sup>71</sup>

Soviet intelligence and diplomatic officials in Great Britain signaled Moscow about Winston Churchill's new belligerence in response to Soviet actions in Eastern Europe, especially Poland. The Soviet ambassador in London, Fedor Gusev, reported to Stalin: "Churchill spoke on Trieste and Poland with great irritation and open venom. We are dealing now with an unprincipled adventurer: he feels more at home in wartime than in peacetime." At the same time, the GRU intercepted Churchill's instruction to Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery to collect and store the captured German weapons for a possible rearming of German troops surrendering to the Western Allies. According to a GRU senior official, Mikhail Milstein, this report poisoned the mood in the Kremlin with new suspicions.<sup>72</sup>

By July 1945, the ominous clouds seemed to break. Truman sought to secure Soviet participation in a war against Japan and tried to make everyone believe that he continued Roosevelt's foreign policy with regard to the Soviet Union. Harry Hopkins made his last trip to Moscow as Truman's ambassador-at-large, spent hours with Stalin, and returned with what he assumed was a compromise on Poland and other thorny issues that had begun to divide the Grand Alliance. The alarm in the Kremlin and in diplomatic and intelligence circles receded. Yet the first days of the Potsdam Conference (July 17–August 2, 1945) were the last days of this complacency. The U.S.-Soviet partnership was about to end—the postwar tension between allies was escalating.

### THE STALIN FACTOR

Soviet diplomat Anatoly Dobrynin once recalled with admiration that Stalin, on the train from Moscow to Baku (from where he would fly to the Tehran Conference of the Big Three) in 1943, had given orders to be left alone in his compartment. "He was not shown any documents and he sat there for three days as far as anyone knew just staring out of the window, thinking and concentrating."<sup>73</sup> What was he thinking about, looking at the ravaged country passing by? We most likely will never know. The evidence on Stalin's views in 1945 resembles bits and pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Stalin preferred to discuss things orally with a few close lieutenants. He put his thoughts on paper only when he had no choice—for example, when he directed diplomatic talks from afar. As a result, even his lieutenants did not know or fully understand his intentions and plans. Stalin

impressed, but also confused and misled, even the most experienced observers and analysts.

Stalin was a man of many identities. His experience growing up in the multi-ethnic, unstable, and vindictive Caucasus had given him an ability to wear many faces and act many roles.<sup>74</sup> Among Stalin's self-identities were the Georgian "Kinto" (an honorable bandit in the style of Robin Hood), revolutionary bank robber, Lenin's modest and devout pupil, "the man of steel" of the Bolshevik Party, great warlord, and "coryphaeus of science." Stalin even had a Russian identity by choice. He also considered himself to be a "realist" statesman in foreign affairs, and he managed to convince many observers of his "realism." Averell Harriman, U.S. ambassador in Moscow in 1943–45, recalled that he found Stalin "better informed than Roosevelt, more realistic than Churchill, in some ways the most effective of the war leaders." Much later, Henry Kissinger wrote that Stalin's ideas about the conduct of foreign policy were "strictly those of Old World *Realpolitik*," similar to what Russian statesmen had done for centuries.<sup>75</sup>

Was Stalin indeed a "realist"? A remarkable expression of Stalin's way of thinking on international relations is found in a cable sent from the Black Sea, where he was vacationing, to Moscow in September 1935. Hitler had been in power for two years in Germany, and Fascist Italy had defied the League of Nations by launching a ruthless and barbarous attack on Abyssinia in Africa. Commissar of Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov believed that Soviet security should be linked to the alliance with Western democracies, Great Britain and France, against the increasingly dangerous tandem of Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Litvinov, a cosmopolitan Old Bolshevik of Jewish descent, felt that the future Axis powers represented a mortal threat to the Soviet Union and European peace. During the worst years of Stalin's purges, Litvinov won many friends for the USSR in the League of Nations for standing against Fascist and Nazi aggression in defense of Europe's collective security.<sup>76</sup> Stalin, as some scholars have long suspected,<sup>77</sup> found Litvinov's activities useful, yet sharply disagreed with him on the reading of world trends. His letter to Molotov and Lazar Kaganovich, another Politburo member, reveals an opposing concept of security: "Two alliances are emerging: the bloc of Italy with France, and the bloc of England with Germany. The bigger the brawl between them, the better for the USSR. We can sell bread to both sides, so that they would continue to fight. It is not advantageous to us if one side defeats the other right now. It is to our advantage to see this brawl continue as much as possible, but without a quick victory of one side over the other."<sup>78</sup>

Stalin expected a prolonged conflict between the two imperialist blocs, a replay

of World War I. The Munich agreement in 1938 between Great Britain and Germany confirmed Stalin's perceptions.<sup>79</sup> The Nazi-Soviet pact of 1939 was his attempt to continue the "brawl" between the two imperialist blocs in Europe, although the composition of these blocs turned out to be drastically different from what he had predicted. The Kremlin strategist would never admit that he disastrously miscalculated Hitler's intentions and that Litvinov's line proved correct.

Revolutionary Bolshevik ideology had shaped Stalin's early thinking about international affairs. In contrast to European Realpolitik statesmen, the Bolsheviks viewed the balance of power and the use of force through lenses of ideological radicalism. They used diplomatic games to preserve the Soviet Union as a base for a world revolution.<sup>80</sup> Bolsheviks were optimists, believing in the imminent collapse of the liberal capitalist order. They also believed they were armed with Marx's scientific theory, the knowledge of which made them superior to liberal capitalist statesmen and diplomats. Bolsheviks ridiculed Woodrow Wilson's attempts to offer a multilateral alternative to the traditional practice of power games and struggle for spheres of influence. For them, Wilsonianism was either hypocrisy or stupid idealism. In all its dealings with the liberal representatives of Western democracies, the Politburo enjoyed pulling the wool over their eyes.<sup>81</sup> During his power struggle against the opposition in 1925–27, Stalin formulated his own optimist-revolutionary position on the prospects for transforming China's Nationalist government, the Guomindang, into a Communist regime. Between 1927 and 1933, Stalin and his supporters imposed on the world Communist movement the doctrine of "the third period": it prophesied a new round of revolutions and wars that "must shatter the world much more than the wave of 1918–1919" and would result "in the proletariat's victory in a number of capitalist countries."<sup>82</sup>

Stalin's worldview was not, however, a mere replica of Bolshevik vision. It was an evolving amalgam, drawing on different sources. One source was Stalin's domestic political experience. After the years of the Kremlin's power struggle, the destruction of opponents, and state-building efforts, Stalin learned to be patient, to react flexibly to opportunities, and to avoid tying his name to any particular position. He, concludes James Goldgeier, "sought to preserve his options unless he felt certain of victory." Always an opportunist of power, he succeeded at home by allying with some of his rivals against others and then destroying them all. Presumably, he was inclined to the same scenario in foreign affairs.<sup>83</sup>

Stalin's dark, mistrusting mind and cruel, vindictive personality made a powerful imprint on his international vision. In contrast to many cosmopolitan-minded and optimist Bolsheviks, he was power-driven, xenophobic, and increasingly cynical.<sup>84</sup> For him, the world, like Communist Party politics, was a hostile and

dangerous place. In Stalin's world, no one could be fully trusted. Any cooperation sooner or later could become a zero-sum game. Unilateralism and force was always a more reliable approach to foreign affairs than agreements and diplomacy. Molotov later said that he and Stalin had "relied on nobody—only on our own forces"<sup>85</sup> In October 1947, Stalin put his views in stark terms to a group of pro-Soviet British Labour Party MPs who came to see him at his Black Sea resort. Contemporary international life, he said, is governed not by "feelings of sympathy" but by "feelings of personal profit." If a country realizes it can seize and conquer another country, it will do so. If America or any other country realizes that England is completely dependent on it, that it has no other way out, then it would swallow England. "Nobody pities or respects the weak. Respect is reserved only for the strong."<sup>86</sup>

During the 1930s, the geopolitical legacy of czarist Russia, the historical predecessor of the USSR, became another crucial source of Stalin's foreign policy thinking.<sup>87</sup> A voracious reader of historical literature, Stalin came to believe he inherited the geopolitical problems faced by the czars. He especially liked to read on Russian diplomacy and international affairs on the eve and during World War I; he also paid close attention to the research of Evgeny Tarle, Arkady Yerusalm-sky, and other Soviet historians who wrote on European Realpolitik, great power alliances, and territorial and colonial conquests. When the party theoretical journal wanted to print Friedrich Engels's article in which he described czarist Russia's foreign policy as expansionist and dangerous, Stalin sided with the czarist policies, not with the views of the cofounder of Marxism.<sup>88</sup> On the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1937, Stalin said that the Russian czars "did do one good thing—they put together an enormous state stretching out to Kamchatka. We inherited this state." The theme of the Soviet Union as a successor to the great Russian empire became one of the mainstays of Stalin's foreign policy and domestic propaganda. Stalin even found time to criticize and edit drafts of school textbooks on Russian history, bringing them into line with his changed beliefs. Khrushchev recalled that, in 1945, "Stalin believed that he was in the same position as Alexander I after the defeat of Napoleon and that he could dictate the rules for all of Europe."<sup>89</sup>

Since the first months of their coming to power in Russia, Lenin and the Bolsheviks had had to balance their revolutionary ambitions and the state interests. This was the origin of the Soviet "revolutionary-imperial paradigm." Stalin offered a new, presumably more stable and effective interpretation of this paradigm. In the 1920s, the Bolsheviks had viewed the Soviet Union as a base for world revolution. Stalin began to view it as a "socialist empire." His worldview focused on the USSR's security and aggrandizement. At the same time, accord-

ing to Stalin, these central goals demanded eventual changes of regime and socioeconomic order for the nations bordering on the Soviet Union.<sup>90</sup>

Stalin was convinced that international affairs were characterized by capitalist rivalry and the development of crisis, as well as the inevitable transition to global socialism. Two other convictions stemmed from this general belief. First, the Western powers, in Stalin's opinion, were likely to conspire against the Soviet Union in the short term. Second, Stalin was certain that the USSR, guided by his statesmanship, caution, and patience, would outfox and outlast any combination of capitalist great powers. During the worst years of the Nazi invasion, Stalin managed to stay on top of diplomacy within the Grand Alliance. As the Soviet Union rapidly moved from the position of backwardness and inferiority to a new place of strength and worldwide recognition, Stalin preferred to avoid committing to limits of Soviet ambitions and boundaries for Soviet security needs. He kept them open-ended, just as they had traditionally been when Russia expanded in czarist times. The Soviet-British "percentage agreement" of October 1944 is a classic example of the clash between Stalin's revolutionary-imperial paradigm and Churchill's Realpolitik. The British leader sought a power balance in Eastern Europe and offered Stalin a diplomatic arrangement on the division of influence in the Balkans. Stalin signed Churchill's "percentage agreement," but his future policies showed that he wanted to push the British completely out of Eastern Europe, relying on the power of the Red Army to set up friendly Communist regimes.<sup>91</sup>

In conversations with Yugoslav, Bulgarian, and other Communists, Stalin liked to don his "realist" mantle and teach his inexperienced junior partners a lesson or two. In January 1945, the Kremlin leader lectured a group of Yugoslav Communists: "In his time Lenin could not even dream of such a correlation of forces that we achieved in this war. Lenin kept in mind that all could come out against us and it would be good if some distant country, for instance America, would stay neutral. And now what we've got is that one group of bourgeoisie came out against us, and another group is with us."<sup>92</sup> A few days later, Stalin repeated the same thoughts in the presence of the Yugoslavs and the former Comintern leader Georgy Dimitrov. On this occasion, however, he added a prediction: "Today we are fighting in alliance with one faction against the other, and in the future we will fight against this capitalist faction as well."<sup>93</sup>

Stalin, posing as a prudent "realist" in dealing with his satellites, believed the Soviet army could help Communists seize power anywhere in Central Europe and the Balkans. When Vasil Kolarov, a Bulgarian Communist working with Dimitrov to create a pro-Soviet Bulgaria, proposed to annex a coastal portion of Greece to Bulgaria, the Soviets refused. "It was impossible," Molotov later commented. "I

took advice from [Stalin], and was told that it should not be done, the time is not good. So we had to keep silent, although Kolarov pressed very hard."<sup>94</sup> Stalin once said about the Greek Communists: "They believed, mistakenly, that the Red Army would reach to the Aegean Sea. We cannot do it. We cannot send our troops to Greece. The Greeks made a stupid error."<sup>95</sup> As far as Greece was concerned, Stalin adhered to the "percentage agreement" with Churchill and ceded it to the British. The Kremlin leader thought it would be a "stupid error" to turn against the British in the Balkans before locking in Soviet wartime gains. There were priority goals, which required British cooperation or, at least, neutrality. He did not want a premature clash with one power from the allied "capitalist faction." This tactic worked well: Churchill reciprocated by refraining from public criticisms of Soviet violations of the Yalta principles in Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria for months afterward.

In spring 1945, the superiority of Stalin's statesmanship over that of his Western partners seemed beyond doubt. Churchillian Realpolitik ended in a fiasco, as the Soviet army, together with the Yugoslav, Bulgarian, and Albanian Communists, swept over the Balkans. Molotov recalled with satisfaction that the British woke up only after "half-of Europe broke away" from their sphere of influence: "They miscalculated. They were not Marxists like us."<sup>96</sup> It was the moment when Stalin's hubris must have been at its peak. Even before the Soviet people and elites celebrated the end of World War II, Stalin was already busy constructing a "socialist empire."

## BUILDING THE EMPIRE

It has now been established beyond a doubt that Stalin was determined to keep Eastern Europe in the Soviet Union's grip at any cost. The Kremlin leader regarded Eastern Europe and the Balkans through strategic lenses as a potential Soviet security buffer against the West. European geography and history, including the recent history of the two world wars, dictated two major directions of Soviet expansion: one through Poland to the German heart of Europe, another through Rumania, Hungary, and Bulgaria to the Balkans and Austria.<sup>97</sup> At the same time, as his conversations with foreign Communists reveal, Stalin defined Soviet security in ideological terms. He also assumed that the Soviet sphere of influence must and would be secured in the countries of Eastern Europe by imposing on them new political and social orders, modeled after the Soviet Union.<sup>98</sup>

For Stalin, the two aspects of Soviet goals in Eastern Europe, security and regime-building, were two sides of the same coin. The real question, however,

was how to achieve both goals. Some Soviet leaders, among them Nikita Khrushchev, hoped that *all* of Europe might turn to Communism after the war.<sup>99</sup> Stalin wanted the same, but he knew that the balance of power would not allow him to achieve this goal. He believed the French or Italian Communists had no chance to seize power while the Allied troops occupied Western Europe. Thus, the Kremlin “realist” was determined to operate within the Grand Alliance framework and to squeeze as much out of his temporary capitalist partners as possible.

Molotov recalled that at the Yalta Conference in February 1945 Stalin attributed enormous significance to the Declaration of Liberated Europe. Roosevelt’s most immediate motivation for this document was to pacify potential domestic critics who were prepared to attack him for collaboration with Stalin. Roosevelt still believed that keeping Stalin as a member of the team was more important than breaking relations with him over Soviet repression in Eastern Europe. At the same time, the president hoped that getting Stalin’s signature on this document might serve as a deterrent to more blatant Soviet aggression, especially in Poland.<sup>100</sup> Stalin, however, interpreted the Declaration as Roosevelt’s recognition of the right of the Soviet Union to have a zone of influence in Eastern Europe. Earlier, the president had acknowledged Soviet strategic interests in the Far East. Molotov was concerned with the language of its American draft, but Stalin told him: “Do not worry. We will implement it in our way later. The essence is in correlation of forces.”<sup>101</sup>

The Soviets and their Communist collaborators pursued two kinds of policies in Eastern Europe. First, there were visible social and political reforms: the dismantling of the old classes of owners (some of whom had already been compromised by their collaboration with Germans and fled their countries); the distribution of land among the peasants; the nationalizing of industries; and the creation of a multiparty parliamentary system or “people’s democracy.” Second, there was the ruthless suppression of armed nationalist opposition and the creation of structures that could later supplant the multiparty “people’s democracy” and provide the basis for Communist regimes. Usually the latter meant putting Soviet agents in control of security agencies, the police, and the army; the infiltration of other ministries and political parties with Soviet fellow-travelers; and the compromising, framing, and eventually elimination of non-Communist political activists and journalists.<sup>102</sup>

Stalin provided general guidelines for these policies through personal meetings and correspondence with Eastern European Communists and via his lieutenants. He entrusted Andrei Zhdanov, Klement Voroshilov, and Andrei Vyshinsky with everyday implementation of these policies in Finland, Hungary, and Rumania, respectively. Reflecting the quasi-imperial aspect of their roles, they

were alluded to in Moscow power circles as “proconsuls.”<sup>103</sup> Inside the Eastern European countries, the Kremlin relied on Soviet military authorities, the secret police, and those Communist expatriates of Eastern European origin, many of them Jews, who had returned to their home countries from Moscow in the rearguard of the Soviet army.<sup>104</sup>

Chaos, war devastation, and nationalist passions in Eastern Europe helped Stalin and the Soviets achieve their goals there. In Hungary, Rumania, and Bulgaria, former reluctant allies of Nazi Germany, the arrival of the Soviet army opened acute social and ideological divisions. Every country was rife with virulent nationalism, accumulated ethnic rivalries, and historical grievances. Poland and Czechoslovakia burned with the desire to get rid of potentially subversive minorities, above all, Germans.<sup>105</sup> Stalin often invoked the specter of Germany as a “mortal enemy of the Slav world” in his conversations with the leaders of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia. He encouraged the Yugoslavs and Rumanians in the belief that he supported their territorial aspirations. He also supported Eastern European politics of ethnic cleansing. Until December 1945, Stalin toyed with the idea of using Pan-Slavic schemes and of organizing Eastern Europe and the Balkans into multiethnic confederations. Later, however, the Soviet leader abandoned this design for reasons that are still unclear. Perhaps he believed it would be easier to divide and rule smaller nation-states rather than multinational confederations.<sup>106</sup>

The Soviet army and the activities of the secret police remained a crucial factor in establishing initial Soviet control in Eastern Europe. In Poland, the Polish Home Army (AK) doggedly resisted Stalin’s plans for Poland.<sup>107</sup> At the Yalta Conference and afterward the controversy over Poland’s future produced the first sparks between the USSR and the Western Allies. Churchill complained that the power of the pro-Soviet government in Poland “rests on Soviet bayonets.” He was absolutely correct. As soon as the Yalta Conference ended, SMERSH representative Ivan Serov reported to Stalin and Molotov from Poland that Polish Communists wanted to get rid of the leader of the Polish government-in-exile, Stanislaw Mikolajczyk. Stalin authorized the arrest of sixteen leaders of the Home Army but ordered Serov to not touch Mikolajczyk. Despite this precaution, Soviet heavy-handed methods backfired. Churchill and Anthony Eden protested against “abominable” Soviet actions. Stalin was especially displeased by the fact that Truman joined Churchill in the protest against the arrests of the AK leaders. In his public reply, Stalin cited the necessity of the arrests “to protect the rear behind the front-lines of the Red Army.” The arrests continued. By the end of 1945, 20,000 people from the Polish underground, the remains of prewar Polish elites and public servants, were locked up in Soviet camps.<sup>108</sup>

Rumania also caused headaches in Moscow. Political elites of this country openly appealed to the British and the Americans for assistance. Prime Minister Nicolae Radescu and the leaders of the "historical" National Peasant Party and National Liberal Party did not conceal their fears of the Soviet Union. Rumanian Communists, repatriated to Bucharest from Moscow, organized the National Democratic Front. They instigated, with clandestine Soviet support, a coup against Radescu, bringing the country to the brink of civil war in late February 1945. Stalin sent Andrei Vyshinsky, one of his most odious henchmen and the infamous prosecutor at the trials of the 1930s, to Bucharest with an ultimatum to King Michael: Radescu must be replaced by Petru Grozu, a pro-Soviet politician. In support of this ultimatum, Stalin ordered two divisions to move into position near Bucharest. The Western powers did not interfere, but the American representatives, including State Department emissary Burton Berry and chief of the American Military Mission Courtlandt Van Rensselaer Schuyler, were aghast and began to share the Rumanian elites' fears of Soviet domination. Facing growing Western discontent, Stalin decided not to touch King Michael and the leaders of both "historical" parties.<sup>109</sup>

Further south, in the Balkans, Stalin built a Soviet sphere of influence in cooperation with Yugoslavia, a major ally. In 1944–45, Stalin believed that the idea of a confederation of Slavic peoples with the leading role taken by Yugoslav Communists would be a good tactical move toward building a socialist Central Europe and would distract the Western powers from Soviet plans to transform political and socioeconomic regimes there. The victorious leader of the Yugoslav Communist guerrillas, Josip Broz Tito, however, was too ambitious. Specifically, he and other Yugoslav Communists wanted Stalin to support their territorial claims against Italy, Austria, Hungary, and Rumania. They also sought Moscow's support for their project of a "greater Yugoslavia," which would include Albania and Bulgaria. For a while Stalin did not express annoyance, and in January 1945 he proposed to the Yugoslav Communists the creation of a dual state with Bulgarians, "like Austria-Hungary."<sup>110</sup>

In May 1945, Trieste, the city and surrounding area disputed between Yugoslavia and Italy since 1919, threatened to become another sore point in the relations between the Soviet Union and the Western allies. Stalin pushed the Yugoslavs to reduce their demands in order to settle the matter with the British and the Americans. Grudgingly, the Yugoslav leadership complied, but Tito could not contain his frustration. In a public speech, he said that the Yugoslavs did not want "to be small change" in "the politics of spheres of interests." This was a serious affront in Stalin's eyes. This must have been the moment when he began to look at Tito with suspicion.<sup>111</sup> Still, throughout the difficult haggling with the

Western powers over peace treaties with Germany's satellites during 1946, the Kremlin leadership defended Yugoslav's territorial claims in Trieste.<sup>112</sup> This behavior can be explained by the infatuation of Russian officials with Pan-Slavic ideas, as well as the vital position of Yugoslavia on the southern flank of the Soviet security perimeter.

In Eastern Europe and the Balkans, Stalin moved unilaterally and with complete ruthlessness. At the same time, he prudently measured his steps, advancing or retreating to avoid an early clash with the Western powers that might endanger the fulfillment of other important foreign policy goals. In particular, Stalin had to balance the tasks in Eastern Europe and the Balkans with the task of creating a pro-Soviet Germany (see chapter 3). Another goal was a future war with Japan.

The months after the Yalta Conference offered Stalin a grand opportunity to lock in war spoils in the Far East. In 1945, Stalin and Soviet diplomats regarded China as an American client and assumed that Soviet interests in the Pacific required expansion to prevent the replacement of Japanese domination there with American domination. Their goal was to make Manchuria part of the Soviet security belt in the Far East.<sup>113</sup> At the victory banquet with the military commanders on May 24, Stalin said that "good diplomacy" sometimes could "have more weight than 2–3 armies." Stalin demonstrated what it meant during his talks with the Chinese Guomintang government in Moscow in July and August 1945.<sup>114</sup> The Yalta agreements, acknowledged by Truman, gave the Kremlin leader a position of tremendous superiority with regard to the Guomintang. Stalin applied unrelenting pressure on the Nationalists, urging them to accept the Soviet Union as China's protector against Japan. He said to Chinese foreign minister T. V. Soong that Soviet demands in regard to Port Arthur, the Chinese Eastern Railway, Southern Sakhalin Island, and Outer Mongolia were "all guided by considerations of strengthening our strategic position against Japan."<sup>115</sup>

Stalin had some strengths to use inside China in bargaining with the Guomintang. Moscow was the only intermediary between the Nationalists and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) that controlled the northern territories of China adjacent to Outer Mongolia. The Soviets also had another, less advertised asset: they secretly funded and armed a separatist Uigur movement in the areas of Xinjiang that bordered on the USSR. During the Moscow talks, Stalin offered to guarantee Chinese integrity in return for big concessions. "As to Communists in China," Stalin said to Dr. Soong, "we do not support and don't intend to support them. We consider that China has one government. We want to deal honestly with China and the allied nations."<sup>116</sup>

The Nationalist leadership resisted doggedly, particularly on the issue of Outer Mongolia. Yet Jiang Jieshi, the leader of China, and Dr. Soong did not have a

choice. They knew that the Red Army was scheduled to invade Manchuria three months after the end of the war in Europe. They feared that the Soviets might then hand over Manchuria to the CCP. Hence, they agreed to sign the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Alliance on August 14. At first, Stalin seemed to keep his promises: the CCP was forced to negotiate a truce with the Nationalist government. Chinese Communists asserted later that Stalin betrayed them and undermined their revolutionary strategy. At the time, however, Mao Ze-dong had to agree with Stalin's logic: the United States was supporting the Guomindang, and the Soviet intervention on the side of the CCP would have meant a quick end to the U.S.-Soviet partnership.<sup>117</sup>

In addition to the impending Soviet invasion of Manchuria, U.S.-Soviet cooperation at Yalta and Potsdam provided the Soviets with the grounds to claim special rights there. Truman could not publicly object to Soviet control over Outer Mongolia and only demanded observance of the Open Door policy. Harriman privately pushed Soong not to give in to Stalin's pressure, but even he had to admit that the Chinese "would never again have an opportunity to reach an agreement with Stalin on as favorable terms." As a result, Stalin wrested from the Guomindang concessions that, in some cases, exceeded the Yalta mandate.<sup>118</sup>

Stalin had equally ambitious plans regarding Japan. On the night of June 26–27, 1945, Stalin convened Politburo members and the high military command to discuss a war plan against Japan. Marshal Kirill Meretskov and Nikita Khrushchev wanted to land Soviet troops in northern Hokkaido. Molotov spoke against this idea, pointing out that such an operation would be a breach of the agreement made with Roosevelt at Yalta. Marshal Georgy Zhukov criticized it as a risky gamble from a military point of view. Stalin, however, supported the plan. He envisioned that this could give the Soviet Union a role in the occupation of Japan. Controlling Japan and its potential military resurgence was as important to Stalin as controlling Germany.<sup>119</sup>

On June 27, 1945, *Pravda* announced that Stalin had assumed the title of Generalissimo. It was the peak of the Kremlin *vozhd's* (leader's) statesmanship. Three weeks later, the Potsdam Conference confirmed Yalta's framework of cooperation among the three great powers. It was an extremely favorable framework for Stalin's diplomacy and imperialist policies. At first, the British delegation, headed by Churchill and then, after his defeat at the polls, the new Labour prime minister Clement Attlee and foreign secretary Ernest Bevin, objected to Soviet positions across the board. In particular, they sharply criticized Soviet actions in Poland and resisted Soviet efforts to get some of the industrial reparations from the Ruhr. A number of Truman's advisers, among them the ambassador in Moscow, Averell Harriman, encouraged the president and his new secre-

tary of state, James Byrnes, to support the British hard line. Truman, however, still needed Soviet assistance in the war against Japan and did not follow this advice. Truman and Byrnes also were receptive to Stalin's demand for a share of reparations from Western zones in Germany and agreed to create a central administration in Germany. In response to the critics, Truman proposed appointing an Allied commission to oversee elections in Rumania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Greece, and other countries. Yet, when Stalin objected, noting that the Americans did not invite the Soviet Union to oversee Italian elections, the president quickly dropped this issue. After Potsdam, Molotov informed Dimitrov that "the main decisions of the conference are beneficial to us." The Western powers, he said, confirmed that the Balkans would become the sphere of influence of the USSR.<sup>120</sup>

### THUNDERBOLT

On August 6, 1945, the first atomic bomb destroyed Hiroshima; three days later, another bomb incinerated Nagasaki. Leading nuclear physicist Yuli Khariton recalled that in Moscow Soviet leaders viewed this "as atomic blackmail against the USSR, as a threat to unleash a new, even more terrible and devastating war."<sup>121</sup> Among Soviet elites, the sense of omnipotence gave way to a new uncertainty. Some Soviet officials told British journalist Alexander Werth that their hard-won victory over Germany was now "as good as wasted."<sup>122</sup>

On August 20, 1945, the Kremlin Generalissimo created a special committee to build atomic weapons and decided that this business must be undertaken "by the entire Party," meaning that the project became a new priority for the entire party-state nomenklatura, as in the previous cases of the collectivization and the industrialization in the 1930s. The project became the first postwar mobilization campaign, one that was highly secret and incredibly costly. Captains of wartime industry, including Dmitry Ustinov, Vyacheslav Malyshev, Boris Vannikov, and hundreds of others, returned to the feverish, sleepless lives they had experienced throughout the war with Germany. Many participants compared it to the Great Patriotic War; one witness recalled: "The works developed on a grandiose scale, mind-boggling things!" Two other grandiose rearmament projects, the first on missiles and the second on anti-aircraft defense, soon followed.<sup>123</sup>

American historians still argue about a possible Soviet motivation in Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb.<sup>124</sup> Whether intended or not, the bomb had a powerful impact on the Soviets. All the previous alarm signals now matched a new and dangerous pattern. The United States still remained an ally, but could it become an enemy again? The abrupt dawn of the atomic age in the midst of Soviet triumph deepened the uncertainty that reigned in the Soviet Union. This uncer-

rainty forced Soviet elites to rally around their leader. Stalin's unique power rested upon mythology and fear, but also on the elites, as well as the Soviet people, looking up to him to respond to external threats. After Hiroshima, Soviet elites united in an effort to conceal their renewed sense of weakness behind the facade of bravado.<sup>125</sup>

The elites also hoped that, under Stalin's leadership, the Soviet Union would not be denied the fruits of its great victory, including the new "socialist empire." And millions in Soviet society, traumatized by the recent bloodbath of World War II and shocked by the hardships of peace, fervently hoped there would not be another war but also trusted in the wisdom of the Kremlin *vozhd*.

## ( CHAPTER 2 )

### STALIN'S ROAD

### TO THE COLD WAR,

1945-1948



It is the height of Anglo-American impudence.  
No elementary feeling of respect toward their ally.  
—Stalin to Molotov, September 1945

I think before ten years elapse they [the Western powers]  
will whip our ass. Our prestige has been declining abominably!  
Nobody will support the Soviet Union.  
—Conversation between Soviet generals, December 1946

CBS correspondent Richard C. Hottelet sat in the apartment of the former commissar of foreign affairs of the Soviet Union, Maxim Litvinov, in Moscow on June 18, 1946. He could not believe his ears. Back in the safety of his office, the journalist recorded what he had heard from the Old Bolshevik. The Kremlin, Litvinov said, had chosen an outmoded concept of security for the Soviet Union—the more territory you get, the safer you become. This would lead to a confrontation with the Western powers, and the best one could hope for was "a prolonged armed truce."<sup>1</sup>

The Yalta and Potsdam decisions legitimized not only the Soviet sphere of influence in Central Europe but also its continued military presence in Germany and its territorial and political expansion in the Far East. In the fall of 1945, the framework of talks among the three great powers, despite the growing tension, still offered some hope for the Soviets, including the possibility of reparations from the Western zones of Germany. Following the first months of peace, however, Stalin began to take one action after another that tested the limits of Allied cooperation. Litvinov's fears and despair were justified: the Kremlin's behavior became a major contributor to the Cold War. But how was Stalin's choice of the "outmoded concept of security" made? What calculations, motives, and domestic forces were driving the Soviet Union toward cold war with the United States?

## AGAINST "ATOMIC DIPLOMACY"

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, followed by Japan's unexpected early collapse, shattered Stalin's calculations that the war in the Pacific might last for months.<sup>2</sup> On August 19, 1945, Stalin still planned to land Soviet troops in Hokkaido. He sent a letter to Truman demanding Soviet occupation of the entire Kurile Islands. He also argued that Russian public opinion "would be seriously offended if the Russian troops would not have an occupation region in some part of the Japanese proper territory." Truman conceded on the Kuriles but flatly rejected Stalin's demand to participate in the occupation of Japan. On August 22, the Kremlin warlord had to cancel the landing on Hokkaido. The United States occupied Japan, and General Douglas MacArthur began to rule it unilaterally, without ever bothering to ask for Soviet input.<sup>3</sup>

Suddenly all of the vague and unresolved diplomatic issues hidden in the U.S.-Soviet understanding on the Far East, as well as on Central Europe, came to the surface. On August 20–21, the American and British representatives in Rumania and Bulgaria informed the Rumanian king, the Bulgarian regent, and the Soviet Allied commissioners in Rumania and Bulgaria that they would not recognize the new governments in Bucharest and Sofia until they included pro-Western candidates. Local U.S. representatives were armed with instructions from U.S. secretary of state James Byrnes to encourage the opposition to fight against violations of the Declaration of Liberated Europe, "if necessary, with the assistance of the three allied [governments]." This new turn of events demonstrated that the Western powers in fact did not grant the Soviets a free hand in the Balkans, and this news galvanized local anti-Communist forces and seriously complicated Soviet plans all over Central Europe. From Latvia to Bulgaria, rumors spread that there would soon be a war between the United States and the USSR and that the Americans would drop the atomic bomb on Stalin and force him to retreat. Soon the foreign minister of Bulgaria announced, to Soviet dismay, that elections in that country would be postponed until it was possible to monitor them by an Allied Control Commission consisting of representatives of the three great powers. "Outrageous capitulation," wrote Georgy Dimitrov in his diary. Soviet sources in Sofia informed Moscow of "brutal pressure of Anglo-Americans."<sup>4</sup>

Heightening Soviet concerns, Byrnes and British secretary of state for foreign affairs Ernest Bevin now acted together, in the same manner Truman and Churchill had done earlier during the crisis over Poland. Stalin immediately instructed General Sergei Biryuzov, the Soviet military commander in Bulgaria: "There should be no concessions whatsoever. No changes in composition of the government."<sup>5</sup> In Stalin's eyes, developments in the Balkans, as well as in Japan, were

part of a Western political offensive, a direct consequence of the changed power balance after Hiroshima. Many in Stalin's entourage, in the military, and in the scientific community felt very much the same way. This perception was remarkably similar to the conclusions, decades later, reached by Gar Alperovitz and other American historians who argued that American diplomacy after Hiroshima became "atomic diplomacy."<sup>6</sup>

On September 11, Byrnes, Bevin, and Molotov met at the London conference of foreign ministers. It became, as historian Vladimir Pechatnov concludes, "a reciprocal demonstration of toughness" between the United States and the Soviet Union. Stalin instructed Molotov to insist on the logic of Yalta, which, in his opinion, confirmed the principle of mutual noninterference of great powers into each other's spheres of influence. He cabled on September 12: "It might happen that the Allies could sign a peace treaty with Italy without us. So what? Then we have a precedent. We would get a possibility in our turn to reach a peace treaty with [the countries of Central Europe] without the Allies." He continued, that even if such behavior would deadlock the conference, "we should not be afraid of such an outcome either."<sup>7</sup>

In the first days of the conference, Byrnes suggested inviting France and China to the discussion of peace treaties with Germany's satellites. Molotov agreed to this without checking with Stalin; in his view, the Americans just wanted to enhance the role of the United Nations, whose other members, they insisted, should attend peace conferences on Finland, Hungary, and Rumania. But Stalin saw each initiative of Western statesmen as part of a larger design to undermine the concept of exclusive spheres of influence that had been agreed upon at Yalta and Potsdam. He was furious at Molotov and instructed his hapless deputy to retract his agreement on Chinese and French participation—a move that stalled the conference. Stalin wrote: "The Allies are pressing on you to break your will. But you must hold on to the end." Molotov agreed that he had "committed a grave oversight." From that moment, in Stalin's eyes, Molotov fell under suspicion of being the "appeaser" of the West.<sup>8</sup>

Whatever Byrnes's intentions were to play "atomic diplomacy," the secretary of state did not want to be seen as ruining popular hopes for postwar cooperation. On September 20, Byrnes attempted to save the conference by proposing to Molotov a treaty of demilitarization of Germany for twenty to twenty-five years. In his communication to Stalin, Molotov recommended accepting Byrnes's proposal, "if the Americans more or less move in our direction on the Balkan countries." But Stalin did not want to pull out Soviet troops from Germany in exchange for a piece of paper guaranteeing its demilitarization.<sup>9</sup> The Kremlin supreme leader instructed Molotov to reject Byrnes's idea. He explained to Molo-



Byrnes's proposal pursued four separate goals: "First, to divert our attention from the Far East, where Americans assume a role of tomorrow's friend of Japan, and to create thereby a perception that everything is fine there; second, to receive from the USSR a formal sanction for the US playing the same role in European affairs as the USSR, so that the US may hereafter, in league with England, take the future of Europe into their hands; third, to devalue the treaties of alliance that the USSR have already reached with European states; fourth, to pull out the rug from under any future treaties of alliance between the USSR and Rumania, Finland, etc."<sup>10</sup>

These words reveal Stalin's thinking to be a combination of insecurity and wide-ranging aspirations. In response to Byrnes's new proposal, Stalin instructed Molotov to propose the establishment of an Allied Control Commission on Japan, similar to that established for Germany. America's exclusive control over Japan was a threat to Stalin's vision of the postwar world, as much as was the U.S. atomic monopoly. Byrnes, supported by the British, refused to discuss the Soviet counterproposal. Stalin was furious: "It is the height of Anglo-American impudence," he cabled to Molotov. "No elementary feeling of respect towards our ally."<sup>11</sup>

Stalin still wanted to do business with the Americans and made attempts to avoid any show of disrespect for Truman.<sup>12</sup> At the same time, he decided to rebuff Byrnes, the suspected architect of "atomic diplomacy." On September 27, Stalin instructed Molotov to display "absolute adamancy" and forget about compromises with the United States. "A failure of the conference would mean the failure of Byrnes, and we must not grieve over that."<sup>13</sup> Molotov still hoped that after days of tough bargaining the Allies would offer a suitable compromise.<sup>14</sup> Stalin, however, was unyielding, and the London conference ended on October 2 in deadlock.

In the short term, Stalin's tactics of stonewalling the London conference produced its desired result. Byrnes was very upset by his failure to reach agreement with the Soviets and decided to back away from his earlier assertive policy. U.S. determination to oppose Soviet behavior in Central Europe declined substantially. Byrnes instructed Averell Harriman to break the deadlock at a personal meeting with Stalin. On October 24–25, Stalin played the gracious host to Harriman at his secret dacha on the Black Sea, in Gagri. During the meeting, Harriman noted that Stalin was "still very irked at our refusal to permit Soviet troops to land at Hokkaido." The Soviet leadership complained that General Douglas MacArthur was making decisions without bothering to transmit them to the Soviets. He said that the Soviet Union would not accept the role of "an American satellite in the Pacific." Perhaps, Stalin said, it would be better for the Soviet Union to step

aside in Japan and let the Americans act as they wished. He, Stalin, was never in favor of isolationism, but "perhaps now the Soviet Union should adopt such a policy."<sup>15</sup>

Harriman found Stalin "inordinately suspicious of our every move," but he left the meeting thinking that Soviet security concerns in Central Europe could be satisfied without closing the region to American trade and economic and cultural influence.<sup>16</sup> He failed to see that for Stalin there was no room for Anglo-Saxons in Central Europe and the Balkans. On November 14, at the same dacha in Gagri, Stalin flatly told Wladyslaw Gomulka and other Polish Communists "to reject the open door policy" of the Americans. He warned the guests that the Anglo-Americans sought "to tear away our allies—Poland, Rumania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria."<sup>17</sup>

Stalin's determination to close Central Europe to Western influence did not mean he abandoned diplomatic games. Suddenly, Byrnes became his preferred partner. The decisive factor was Byrnes's acquiescence to the Soviet demand to exclude France and China from the peace treaties negotiation format. On December 9, in his cable from the Black Sea to the Politburo foreign policy "Quartet" in the Kremlin (Molotov, Lavrenty Beria, Georgy Malenkov, and Mikoyan), Stalin wrote that "we won the struggle" and forced the United States and Britain to retreat in the Balkans. He berated Molotov again for giving in to pressure and intimidation from the United States. "It is obvious," he concluded, "that in dealing with such partners as the U.S. and Britain we cannot achieve anything serious if we begin to give in to intimidation and betray uncertainty. To get anything from this kind of partner, we must arm ourselves with the policy of tenacity and steadfastness."<sup>18</sup> The supreme leader demonstrated to his subordinates that they needed his guidance in postwar affairs as much as they had during the war.

When Stalin met with Byrnes in Moscow in December, he treated him as a guest of honor. But American concessions (the creation of the Allied Control Commission in Japan) fell short of his demands. Yet he still needed Byrnes's cooperation to achieve favorable results on German reparations, as well as on the peace treaties with Germany and its former satellites. Byrnes did not attempt to play the atomic card, did not act in tandem with the British, and did not press the Soviets on their separatist adventures in northern Iran. In general, both sides bargained in the give-and-take style Stalin felt was his strong suit, including mutual consolidation of spheres of influence and concessions.<sup>19</sup>

Byrnes also recognized the rigged elections in Bulgaria and Rumania, in return for small changes in the governments and public assurances that the Kremlin would respect political "freedoms" and the rights of the opposition.

Stalin immediately called the Bulgarian Communist leader, Georgy Dimitrov, in Sofia and told him to pick “a couple of representatives from the opposition” and give them “insignificant ministries.” After that, according to Harriman, “the Russian attitude changed completely and thereafter, collaboration on many other world problems was easily secured.”<sup>20</sup>

Stalin’s diplomacy of linkage was successful in the Balkans. On January 7, 1946, Stalin shared his victorious mood with the Bulgarian Communist leaders. Stalin exclaimed: “Your opposition can go to the devil! They boycotted the elections. Now three great powers recognized these elections.” The Western powers, he concluded, may be angry at the Bulgarian Communist government for arresting the opposition leaders, but “they will not dare” to blame the Soviet Union.<sup>21</sup> Stalin’s tactics in the Balkans did not change after Churchill gave his famous speech at Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946, warning the United States that the whole of Eastern Europe now was behind the “iron curtain” and under the increasing control of Moscow. Churchill’s call for the U.S.-British alliance to balance Soviet power gave pause to some Eastern European Communist leaders, but Stalin, aware of their vacillations, kept pushing them. He criticized Dimitrov for his caution and ordered him to finish off the opposition immediately.<sup>22</sup>

Stalin was more careful with other European countries within Soviet reach. Finland, despite its proximity to Soviet borders, managed to escape the noose of sovietization. At a meeting with a Finnish delegation in October 1945, Stalin called Soviet policy toward Finland “generosity by calculation.” He said: “When we treat neighboring countries well, they will respond in kind.” This “generosity” had strict limits: Stalin’s lieutenant Andrei Zhdanov worked hard to squeeze every ounce of war reparations (in raw materials) out of Finland.<sup>23</sup> In the same calculated way, Stalin preferred to pretend that the Soviet Union continued to heed Anglo-American sensibilities on Poland. He repeatedly advised his Polish Communist clients “not to breach” the Yalta and Potsdam agreements. He told them to tolerate Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, even though he called him “a British puppet.” Yet, when the Poles mentioned that Churchill’s Fulton speech encouraged the opposition to expect “liberation” by the Western powers, Stalin confidently said that the United States and Great Britain were not ready to break up with the USSR. “They will try to intimidate us, but if we ignore it, then they gradually stop making noise.”<sup>24</sup>

Stalin’s struggle against American “atomic diplomacy” was not limited to central Europe; it extended to the Far East as well. In October, the Kremlin took an uncompromising line toward the Guomindang and began to encourage the CCP forces in Manchuria. Chinese historians link this change to U.S. refusal to acknowledge a Soviet role in Japanese affairs at the London conference.<sup>25</sup> But it

was part of Stalin’s reaction to the “atomic diplomacy” practiced by Byrnes. When Stalin received reports in late September that U.S. marines were landing in Manchuria to aid the Guomindang, he was angered.<sup>26</sup> In his view, this portended a shift in the balance of forces and a threat to Soviet longer-term influence in Northeast Asia. The Kremlin again sought to exploit the presence of the Chinese Communists in Manchuria as a counterbalance to the Nationalist government.

In late November, Truman sent George Marshall, celebrated military leader, on a diplomatic mission to China to build up the Nationalists against the Soviets and the CCP. When Marshall arrived in China, however, Stalin had already shifted from the “policy of steadfastness” to tactics of compromise. Soviet representatives in Manchuria began to cooperate with Guomindang officials. As in Europe, in the Far East, Stalin wanted to signal to the Americans that he was prepared to return to the framework of Yalta. Stalin knew that Soviet troops had to leave Manchuria soon. But, meanwhile, the struggle for that crucial area continued. From December 1945 to January 1946, Jiang Jieshi, leader of the Republic of China, tried to revisit the understanding on Manchuria. This time, instead of the pro-American Dr. Soong, he sent his son, Jian Jinguo, to Moscow. Jian had grown up in the Soviet Union and was a former member of the Soviet Communist Party.<sup>27</sup>

Moscow met the envoy with skepticism. Solomon Lozovsky, deputy commissar for foreign affairs, wrote in his memo to the leadership that Jiang Jieshi was “trying to balance between the U.S. and the USSR.” This ran counter to the Soviet objective—to keep the United States away from Manchuria. “We got rid of the Japanese neighbor on our borders and we cannot allow that Manchuria becomes an arena of economic and political influence of another great power.” Vigorous measures, Lozovsky suggested, must be taken to prevent American economic penetration into northern China.<sup>28</sup> Stalin himself could not have put it better.

Truman helped the Soviets on December 15 by announcing that the United States would not intervene militarily in the Chinese civil war on the side of the Guomindang. This news weakened Jiang Jieshi’s position on the eve of the Moscow talks. His son informed Stalin confidentially that the Guomindang Nationalist government, in exchange for Stalin’s help in restoring its control over Manchuria and Xinjiang, was prepared to develop a “most intimate” alliance with the USSR. Jiang also promised to demilitarize the Soviet-Chinese border and to grant the USSR “the leading role in [the] Manchurian economy.” However, Jiang Jieshi insisted on preserving the Open Door policy in northern China and let Stalin know that he was not prepared to be exclusively on the Soviet side.<sup>29</sup>

Stalin proposed an agreement on economic cooperation in China’s Northeast

that would exclude the Americans. His goal was complete control over Manchuria, and this could be most easily achieved by Soviet military occupation and, after their withdrawal, by the CCP forces as a counterbalance to the Guomindang Nationalist government and the Americans. Therefore, Stalin firmly refused Jiang Jieshi's plea to apply pressure on Mao Ze-dong; he only directed the Chinese Communists to assume a lower profile and focus on occupation of smaller cities and the countryside.<sup>30</sup>

The United States forcefully responded to what appeared to be a Sino-Soviet rapprochement. In February 1946, the Americans pushed Jiang Jieshi to abrogate the bilateral economic talks with Moscow. They also attempted to compromise the Sino-Soviet Treaty, by publishing the secret agreements on China reached by Roosevelt and Stalin. In response, Soviet representatives openly rejected the Open Door policy in the Chinese Northeast. Although Moscow announced withdrawal of its troops from Manchuria, the Kremlin finally allowed the CCP forces to occupy major cities in China's Northeast.<sup>31</sup>

What began so auspiciously for Moscow, however, led to major disruptions in the careful balance of the Yalta-Potsdam system. Although Stalin attempted to time the military withdrawal from Manchuria to pressure the Guomindang to make economic concessions to the Soviet Union and prevent the imposition of the Open Door policies there, he failed to achieve these aims.<sup>32</sup> And, despite Stalin's machinations, he was not able to turn Manchuria into an exclusive Soviet sphere of influence. In the end, he had to cede this area to the triumphant Chinese Communists, in exchange for Mao Ze-dong's promises of strategic alliance with the Soviet Union.

#### PROBING THE PERIPHERY

For several months, until August 1945, the Kremlin breathed in the heady atmosphere of limitless horizons and aspirations, and even Hiroshima could not immediately dash them. Stalin was building a security buffer in Central Europe and in the Far East, and he also began to pay special attention to Turkey and Iran.

For centuries, the rulers of Russia had coveted the Turkish Straits, linking the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. In 1915, at the peak of the Great War, in which Turkey sided with Germany and Austria-Hungary, Great Britain even promised to support Russia's aspirations to claim the straits and the littoral zone of Turkey as its sphere of influence. The victory of the Bolsheviks, however, made this secret agreement null and void. During the Soviet-German talks in Berlin in November 1940, Molotov, on Stalin's instructions, insisted that Bulgaria, the Turkish Straits, and the Black Sea area should be a Soviet sphere of influence.

Stalin returned to his demand with a vengeance during his talks with his Western partners in the Grand Alliance. He wanted to "revise" the Montreux Convention of 1936, which allowed Turkey to build military defenses on the straits and to close the passage to other countries' military ships moving through the straits during wartime.<sup>33</sup> Stalin wanted the Soviet navy to have access to the Mediterranean at any time. At the Tehran Conference in 1943, Churchill and Roosevelt agreed that some revision would be made, and during secret talks with Stalin in Moscow in October 1944 Churchill seemed to agree to Soviet demands.<sup>34</sup>

In 1944–45, Soviet diplomats, historians, and international law experts unanimously concurred that this was a unique moment to lay "the issue of the straits" to rest once and for all. Litvinov wrote to Stalin and Molotov in November 1944 that the British should be persuaded to cede to the Soviet Union "the responsibility" for the zone of the straits. Another expert in the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs suggested that the best way to guarantee Soviet security interests would be "a bilateral Soviet-Turkish agreement on a joint defense of the straits."<sup>35</sup> Reflecting the Kremlin's high expectations after the takeover of half of Europe, all these proposals rested on the assumption that Great Britain and the United States would recognize Soviet geopolitical predominance ("geographic proximity") in Turkey.<sup>36</sup>

The Soviet army swept through Bulgaria, and some in the military, spurred on by the victories, encouraged Stalin to invade Turkey.<sup>37</sup> The major problem for the Soviets, however, remained the fact that Turkey, unlike during World War I, preserved strict neutrality. Consequently, the Soviet army could not support Moscow's diplomacy with force. Nevertheless, the Kremlin ruler decided to act forcefully and unilaterally, without preliminary agreements with Western allies. On June 7, 1945, on Stalin's instructions, Molotov met with the Turkish ambassador in Moscow, Selim Sarper, and rejected Turkey's proposal to sign a new treaty of alliance with the Soviet Union. Instead, Moscow demanded from Turkey the abolishing of the Montreux Conventions and the establishing of joint protection for the straits in peacetime. The Soviets demanded the right to build military bases, jointly with Turkey, on the Turkish Straits. Molotov also shocked the Turks by insisting on the return of all "disputed" territories in the southern Caucasus that Soviet Russia had ceded to Turkey under the 1921 treaty.<sup>38</sup>

New evidence shows that, in his hubris, Stalin wanted to destroy Turkey's ability to act as an independent player between the British empire and the Soviet Union. The control over the straits was a geopolitical priority, since it would have turned the Soviet Union into a Mediterranean power. Territorial demands became an important second goal that, in Stalin's opinion, helped to achieve the first.

Stalin planned to use the "Armenian card" to annex the eastern Turkish prov-

inces around Lake Van, Ardvin, and Kars. In 1915, over a million Armenians living in those provinces, then part of the Ottoman Empire, became the target of brutal massacres and forced deportations. In August 1920, according to the Treaty of Sevres, which divided the Ottoman Empire, these provinces were assigned to an "Armenian state." However, the Armenians lost the war against the Turkish army, led by Mustafa Kemal (Ataturk). Lenin and the Bolshevik government, including Stalin, became allied with Kemalist Turkey, and in the Soviet-Turkish Treaty of 1921, gave up the "Armenian" provinces. In the spring of 1945, Armenians worldwide pinned their hopes on the Kremlin's policies. Armenian organizations, including the wealthiest ones in the United States, appealed to Stalin to organize mass repatriation of Armenians into Soviet Armenia—with the hope that the USSR would give them the lands "reclaimed" from Turkey. In May, Stalin authorized the officials of Soviet Armenia to explore the possibility of a massive Armenian repatriation. This, in his calculations, could help to undermine possible Western support of Turkey and provide a "humanitarian" cover to Soviet demands.<sup>39</sup>

The Turkish government responded that it would be ready to reach a bilateral agreement but rejected Soviet territorial claims and the demand for "joint" defense of the straits. However, as Molotov recalled later, Stalin ordered him to keep pushing.<sup>40</sup> On the eve of the Yalta Conference, Stalin told the Bulgarian Communist leader, Vasil Kolarov, that "there is no place for Turkey on the Balkans."<sup>41</sup> At the same time, the Kremlin leader probably expected that the Americans, still interested in getting the USSR to join the war in the Pacific, would remain neutral on the Turkish issue. At Potsdam, the British and the Americans confirmed their general agreement to make changes in the control of the straits. Truman, however, introduced a proposal that advocated free and unrestricted navigation of international inland waterways and opposed any fortifications on the Turkish Straits. Despite this proposal, internal Soviet assessments of Potsdam were optimistic. On August 30, the eve of the London meeting of foreign ministers, Stalin said to the Bulgarian Communists that the problem with the Turkish bases on the Dardanelles "will be solved at the conference." If not, he added, the Soviet Union would then raise the question of an outlet on the Mediterranean.<sup>42</sup>

In London, Molotov presented the Allies with a proposal to give the Soviet Union a mandate over Tripolitania (Libya), a former Italian colony. This was not just a tactical device but an expression of the Soviet postwar expansionist mood. Stalin-Molotov secret correspondence reveals that the Soviet leadership was banking on a vague promise that Roosevelt's secretary of state, Edward

Stettinius, had given them during the San Francisco conference in April 1945. When Stalin learned that the Americans sided with the British in opposing the establishment of a Soviet naval base there, he instructed Molotov to demand at least bases for the merchant fleet. In the end, U.S.-British resistance denied the Soviets the much-coveted presence in the Mediterranean.<sup>43</sup>

Turkey also put up strong resistance to Soviet demands. Had Stalin proposed a bilateral security alliance and special rights in the straits without bases in June 1945 to the Turkish government, Turkey probably would have agreed.<sup>44</sup> However, the Soviet ultimatum created a nationalist backlash—the Turkish leadership refused to keep the straits shut for all naval powers except the USSR. After Stalin's death, Khrushchev made these views public at a Central Committee plenum: "Turks are no fools. The Dardanelles is not only Turkish business. It is the spot where interests of many states intersect."<sup>45</sup> The ultimatum to Turkey revealed the limits of Stalin's power—his Napoleonic hubris prevailed over caution. Stalin, however, was not ready to give up. True to his political style, he continued the "war of nerves" against Turkey, adding pressure and then feigning retreat.

In late 1945 and early 1946, the Kremlin preferred, as historian Jamil Hasanli concludes, to implement Soviet objectives in Turkey through Georgian and Armenian officials.<sup>46</sup> Stalin tapped into nationalist aspirations in those Soviet republics. In fact, these aspirations led, unexpectedly, to considerable tension between Armenian and Georgian Communists. Armenia's sudden prominence in Stalin's plans vexed the officials of Georgia. They nurtured their own "national project," according to which the disputed Turkish provinces allegedly constituted Georgian ancestral lands. Khrushchev claimed in 1955 that Lavrenty Beria, Stalin's secret police henchman and leader of the Soviet atomic project, together with Georgian officials, persuaded Stalin to try to annex the southeastern part of the Black Sea coast from Turkey. In his memoirs about his father, Beria's son confirmed this.<sup>47</sup> In May and June 1945, Georgian diplomats and scholars obtained authorization in Moscow to do research on Georgia's "rights" to claim the Turkish lands around Trabzon, populated by the Lazi, an ethnic group that supposedly was part of the ancient Georgian people. Davy Sturua, whose father was the chairman of Georgia's Supreme Soviet, recalled that many Georgians eagerly anticipated the "liberation" of that land. Had Stalin seized those lands, Sturua concluded, "he would have become God in Georgia." By September 1945, the leaders of Georgia and Armenia submitted their conflicting claims to the same Turkish provinces to the Kremlin: their language and arguments had nothing to do with Communist "internationalism" but instead with nationalism.<sup>48</sup>

On December 2, 1945, the Soviet press published a government decree autho-

izing repatriation of Armenians from abroad to Soviet Armenia. On December 20, Soviet newspapers published an article by two authoritative Georgian academicians, "On Our Lawful Demands to Turkey." The article (based on their earlier memos written to Molotov and Beria) appealed to "world public opinion" to help Georgia get back the "ancestral lands" that the Turks had conquered centuries ago. At that time, rumors circulated in South Caucasus that the Soviet Union was getting ready for a war with Turkey. There were indications of Soviet military preparations in Bulgaria and Georgia.<sup>49</sup>

In early December 1945, rumors of war with the Soviet Union provoked large anti-Soviet nationalist demonstrations in Istanbul. Reporting on these events to Moscow, Soviet ambassador S. A. Vinogradov proposed to present them to Washington and London as evidence of a "fascist threat." He also suggested that they could be a good pretext for severing diplomatic relations with Turkey and for taking measures to ensure our security," a euphemism for military preparations. To the ambassador's shock, on December 7 Stalin rejected Vinogradov's proposals. "Weapon-rattling may have a nature of provocation," he wrote in a cable, referring to the ambassador's idea of using military exercises for blackmailing Turkey. Stalin then urged Vinogradov to "not lose one's head and avoid making thoughtless proposals that may lead to political aggravation for our state."<sup>50</sup>

The Kremlin *vozhd* still hoped to neutralize the growing resistance of Western powers to Soviet demands to Turkey. The "Armenian card" and the letter of Georgian academics were timed to influence the discussions at the conference of foreign ministers of the great powers in Moscow on December 16–26, 1945. Here, the Kremlin ruler wanted to charm Byrnes, not scare him away. Besides, Stalin's sense of priority and urgency led him to redirect his energies from Turkey to Iran, where chances for the success of Soviet expansion seemed to be very high at that time.

Stalin's policies toward Iran were another attempt to combine important strategic objectives with the mobilization of regional and domestic nationalism. During World War II, Iran began to gravitate into the German orbit. In 1941, after Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, Soviet troops and British troops occupied the country, dividing their occupation zones roughly along the old demarcation line between British and Russian imperial interests from the beginning of the century. According to the agreements of Yalta and Potsdam, these troops would be withdrawn from Iran within six months of the end of the war. In the meantime, the Politburo, however, decided to gain access to Iranian oil and, when the

Tehran government resisted, decided to use the population of southern Azerbaijan (part of northern Iran) as a means of pressure on Iran and the West. The head of the Soviet Azerbaijan Republic, Mir Jafar Bagirov, repeatedly appealed to Stalin to use the favorable situation of Soviet occupation of northern Iran for "reunification" of Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan. Historian Fernande Scheid concludes that Stalin decided to use Azeri nationalism, while attempting to play "a rather old-fashioned game of power politics, taking as much as he could without jeopardizing the relationship with his allies."<sup>51</sup>

Oil was the Kremlin's most important consideration. The dramatic dash of Hitler's mechanized armies toward the oil refineries of Grozny and Baku in 1942 helped to focus Soviet attention on the broader issue of the "struggle for oil." Former Soviet oil minister Nikolai Baibakov recalled that in 1944 Stalin suddenly asked at him if the Western allies would "crush us if they get a chance." If Western powers were able to deny the USSR access to oil reserves, Stalin explained, then all Soviet war arsenals would become worthless. Baibakov left Stalin's office reflecting that the USSR needed "much, very much oil."<sup>52</sup>

Throughout the war and the Soviet occupation of Iran, the Soviets tried to legalize their rights to drill oil in northern Iran. The anti-Communist Iranian government and the majority in the Majlis (parliament), supported by the British interests, successfully rebuffed these attempts. On August 16, 1944, Beria reported to Stalin and Molotov that "the British, and possibly Americans, secretly work against a transfer of oil fields in Northern Iran to the Soviet Union." The report emphasized that "the U.S. actively began to seek oil contracts for American companies in Iranian Baluchistan" and concluded that "successes of U.S. oil policy in the Middle East began to impinge on British interests and led to aggravation of Anglo-American contradictions." Beria recommended pushing for a Soviet-Iranian agreement on oil concessions in northern Iran and making "a decision on Soviet participation in Anglo-American oil talks." The last suggestion implied that the Soviet Union could join the oil club of three great powers in Iran.<sup>53</sup>

Stalin ignored the last point but implemented the first. The development of oil fields in Iran became his priority, along with the development of Soviet oil reserves beyond the Urals, as part of the Soviet Union's postwar economic plans. In September 1944, Molotov's deputy and Stalin's protégé, Sergei Kavtaradze, went to Tehran to demand oil concessions. Despite great pressure, Prime Minister Muhammad Sa'id refused to negotiate until after the end of the war and the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Iranian territory. In June 1945, Soviet policy toward Iran entered a new, more aggressive phase. After consultation with

the “troika” of Molotov, Kavtaradze, and Bagirov, Stalin ordered exploration of oil fields in northern Iran (at Bender-Shah and Shahi) with the aim of starting to drill in late September.<sup>54</sup>

Aside from the importance of oil, Stalin’s strategic motives in Iran were to keep the Western powers, particularly the United States, away from Soviet borders. George Kennan, American charge d’affaires in Moscow, recognized this motive, as well as the British consul in Mashhad, who wrote in his memoirs that it was, “above all, the efforts of Standard and Shell to secure oil-prospecting rights that changed the Russians in Persia from hot-war allies into cold-war rivals.”<sup>55</sup> Stalin’s security criteria were the same for northern Iran as they were for Manchuria and Manchuria: Soviet control over strategic communications and a total ban on a Western business presence and even on the presence of foreign nationals.

There were other parallels between Soviet behavior in Manchuria and Iran. The Soviet army remained Stalin’s biggest asset as long as it occupied northern Iran. He also had allies inside Iran that he used to manipulate the Iranian government. The People’s Party of Iran (Tudeh), a Marxist-Leninist organization from the Comintern days, enjoyed some support among leftist Iranian intellectuals and nationalists. However, events of 1944–45 proved that the Tudeh was a very limited asset. Stalin decided to use the Azeri nationalist card to create a separatist movement in northern Iran. Then the Soviets could blackmail the Iranian government, just as they had done with the Guomindang using the Chinese Communists.<sup>56</sup>

On July 6, 1945, Stalin sanctioned “measures to organize a separatist movement in Southern Azerbaijan” and other provinces of northern Iran. The decision aimed “to create inside the Iranian state a national autonomous Azeri region with broad jurisdiction,” to instigate separatist movements in Gilan, Mazenderan, Gorgan, and Khorasan, and “to encourage” Iranian Kurds to assert their autonomy. The Soviet Union would provide armaments, printing presses, and money to the separatists. Defense Minister Nikolai Bulganin and the Azerbaijan leader Bagirov were in charge of these policies. The day-to-day practical implementation of the plan fell to Bagirov and the group of Soviet advisers in Baku and Tehran, most of them ethnic Azeris.<sup>57</sup> Stalin told Bagirov that it was time to reunify Azerbaijan and northern Iran. In the months that followed, Bagirov and the entire Azeri party machine enthusiastically implemented Stalin’s instructions.<sup>58</sup>

Even British and American officials recognized that there was enough local fuel for nationalist insurrection in northern Iran—the Soviets only had to light a match.<sup>59</sup> The only problem that Stalin had was the shortage of time after the abrupt end of the war with Japan. Louise L’Estrange Fawcett correctly observed:

“It can be no coincidence that the ADP’s [Azerbaijan Democratic Party’s] reaction coincided almost exactly with the end of the war with Japan, which marked the beginning of the six-month period” after which Moscow, London, and Washington had agreed to withdraw their troops from Iran. In September, the clock began to tick toward the deadline for withdrawal.<sup>60</sup>

From late September until December, the new autonomist movement, supported by Bagirov and the NKVD, created new power structures in Azerbaijan and almost totally dismantled Tehran’s administration there. Soviet occupational authorities engineered a forceful merge of Tudeh’s northern branches with the new pro-Soviet ADP. The leadership of the Tudeh, mostly veteran revolutionaries of the early 1920s, wanted to turn Iran into a leader of the anticolonial struggle in the Middle East and South Asia. But these dreams were brushed aside by the Soviets since they did not fit with Stalin’s plans. The Soviet embassy in Tehran instructed the Tudeh to refrain from revolutionary activities in major Iranian cities. Meanwhile, the creation of the Azeri autonomist movement evoked an enthusiastic response among the Azeri population. The nationalist card seemed to have brought an immediate political victory for Moscow.<sup>61</sup>

In December 1945, on the eve of Stalin’s meeting with Byrnes and Bevin in Moscow, the Soviets launched two secessionist regimes: in Iranian Azerbaijan and in the Republic of Kurdistan. Throughout the Iranian crisis, all sides, including the USSR, Great Britain, and the United States, had oil and influence in Iran as primary considerations. For the moment, however, Stalin seemed to be holding all the cards, but he preferred to avoid a direct showdown with the West. He may have expected that the British and the Americans would eventually prefer to resolve the future of Iran at a trilateral conference (as Russia and Great Britain had done in 1907).<sup>62</sup> Indeed, Byrnes refused to join the British in their protest against the Soviet instigation of Iranian separatism. The secretary of state was eager to reach a general agreement with Stalin.<sup>63</sup>

Stalin’s methods reveal a recognizable pattern. Each time, the Soviet leader sided with expansionist-minded subordinates and effectively mobilized jingoist sentiments in the Soviet bureaucracy. The Soviets acted unilaterally, under the camouflage of secrecy and denial. They exploited the presence of the indigenous revolutionary and nationalist movements but preferred to create movements under their control in order to further their goals. Although Stalin pretended to stay within the framework of great power diplomacy, he constantly tested its limits. This pattern allowed Stalin to achieve impressive tactical victories in Central Europe and the Far East. The Kremlin ruler, however, did not realize that every such victory wasted Soviet postwar political capital in the United States. Ultimately, it exhausted the potential for Stalin’s diplomacy.

## FROM IRAN TO A COLD WAR

The Iranian government began to realize it would have to negotiate a deal directly with Moscow. On February 19, 1946, the new Iranian prime minister, Ahmad Qavam al-Saltana, came to Moscow to meet Stalin. The talks lasted for three weeks. During the war, Qavam had leaned toward the Soviet side, and this factor may have influenced Soviet tactics. Stalin and Molotov acted as a “good cop–bad cop” team: on the one hand, they dangled before Qavam a promise to act as mediators between Tehran and the separatist regimes; on the other hand, they pressed the prime minister to grant oil concessions to the Soviet Union. Qavam pointed out the Majlis’s explicit ban on any oil concessions while foreign troops remained in Iranian territory. Stalin encouraged Qavam to change the Iranian constitution and rule without the Majlis. Soviet troops, he promised, would “secure” Qavam’s rule. To emphasize the last point, Soviet tank formations began a movement toward Tehran. The Iranian leader ignored this poisoned offer; however, he promised Stalin he would obtain an oil concession for the Soviet Union after the Majlis elections.<sup>64</sup>

Soon it became clear that Qavam had outfoxed Stalin. Jamil Hasanli concludes that the Iranian prime minister “correctly assessed U.S. capabilities in the post-war world” and shifted his orientation from the Soviet Union to the United States. While the talks dragged on in Moscow, the international deadline for withdrawal of foreign troops from Iran passed on March 2, 1946. The Soviet Union found itself in an open breach of this agreement. The Iranian government and the Majlis, encouraged by American diplomats, decided to bring this case to the United Nations, a brilliant move that changed the whole game in Iran. Suddenly, American public opinion became galvanized by “the Iranian crisis”: now at stake was not only the future of Iran’s oil but also the ability of the new United Nations to defend its members against the encroachments of the big powers.<sup>65</sup>

The Soviet-Iranian conflict occurred at the time of an anti-Soviet shift in U.S. foreign policy and military circles: by March these groups began to see every Kremlin move as part of an aggressive Communist pattern. Truman decided to send the battleship USS *Missouri* to the Turkish Straits to support Turkey in the face of the Soviet ultimatum. On February 28, Byrnes publicly proclaimed a new policy of “patience with firmness” toward the Soviet Union. George Kennan sent his “long telegram” from Moscow a day after Stalin’s first meeting with Qavam. He explained that the United States could not turn the Soviet Union into a reliable international partner and suggested a containment of Soviet expansionism. On the next day after Churchill’s speech in Fulton, Missouri, the United States delivered a note of protest, saying that it could not “remain indifferent” to the delay of

Soviet military withdrawal from Iran. The Iranian prime minister left Moscow on the day *Pravda* published Stalin’s angry reply to Churchill. The support of Iran in the spring of 1946, one historian concluded, “marked the transition from a passive to an active policy” for the postwar United States.<sup>66</sup>

The hearing of the Iranian affair at the United Nations was scheduled for March 25. As Molotov began to prepare for this event, he discovered that the Soviet Union faced diplomatic isolation. “We began to probe [on Iran],” he recollected, “but nobody supported us.”<sup>67</sup> Stalin failed to predict the far-reaching impact of the Iranian crisis. He regarded the fuss about Iran as just another test of nerves, an ongoing rivalry among a few statesmen. The sudden intensity of American involvement puzzled him. One day before the UN hearing, the Kremlin ruler ordered the immediate withdrawal of troops and instructed the Soviet ambassador in Tehran to strike a deal with Qavam. This pattern of behavior, pressing until the last moment before the collision and then pulling away, reflected Stalin’s understanding of how international affairs worked. The damage, however, was done: Stalin’s pressure on Iran, combined with his belligerence toward Turkey, put the Soviet Union on a collision course not only with the Truman administration but also with broad segments of American public opinion.

In response to cries of betrayal from the dispirited leader of the ADP, Jafar Pishevari, Stalin sent him an amazingly hypocritical letter. He asserted that bigger “revolutionary” reasons, which Pishevari was unable to see, necessitated the Soviet pullout. If Soviet troops had stayed in Iran, Stalin wrote, this would have “undercut the basis of our liberationist policies in Europe and Asia.” The Soviet withdrawal, he continued, would delegitimize the Anglo-American military presence in other countries and facilitate a movement of liberation there and “would render our policy of liberation more justified and efficient.”<sup>68</sup>

Soviet diplomatic defeat at first was not apparent. Stalin felt vindicated for a brief time in April 1946 when Qavam agreed to grant oil concessions to the Soviets, contingent upon the approval of the newly elected Majlis. Only in September did Stalin admit that the Iranian parliament was not about to ratify Qavam’s concession. As usual, he blamed his underlings for “an oversight” but did not punish anybody.<sup>69</sup> In October, the Iranian prime minister engineered a rightist crackdown on the separatists. Kurdish and Azeri regimes in northern Iran, left without Soviet military support, were doomed. When Iranian troops entered the northern provinces, Stalin abandoned the rebels to their fate. Responding to frantic appeals from Baku, he opened the Soviet border for ADP elites and some refugees, but did nothing else. Despite the collapse, Bagirov and many others in Soviet Azerbaijan continued to hope that “in a case of military conflict” between the Soviet Union and Iran, there would be a chance to annex

Iranian territories and “reunify” Azerbaijan.<sup>70</sup> However, the Kremlin leadership had never wanted to provoke a war over Azerbaijan.

Almost simultaneously, Stalin suffered another regional defeat. On August 7, 1946, the Soviets sent a note to the Turks, restating their “proposal” of the “joint” control of the straits. There was not a word about territorial demands in the note, and Soviet diplomats hinted that if an agreement on the straits was reached, these demands would be dropped. The Turks, now backed by Washington and London, responded with a firm refusal. Again, Stalin’s new move in his war of nerves against Turkey backfired by producing a genuine “war scare” among U.S. politicians and the military. Prompted by foggy intelligence signals and exaggerated estimates about Soviet military concentration near Turkey’s borders, some in these circles began to contemplate, for the first time, an atomic strike against the Soviet Union, including the plants of the Urals and the Caucasus oil industry. This time, as some evidence suggests, Stalin may have realized just how close he was to the brink and called the campaign off. Publicly, however, he dismissed the American atomic monopoly with his usual bravado.<sup>71</sup>

Once again, Stalin was not ready to clash with the United States over Turkey—to the great chagrin of Georgian officials. Around that time, Akaki Mgeladze, the senior Georgian official, expressed his frustration in a private conversation with Marshal Fedor Tolbukhin, commander of the Trans-Caucasus military district. Ukrainians, Mgeladze complained, had “regained” all their lands but Georgians were still waiting. Tolbukhin expressed his complete sympathy for the aspirations of the Georgian people.<sup>72</sup>

The behavior of the United States was another crucial factor that confused Stalin’s calculations. From February 1946 on, the United States adopted a new strategy of actively defending Western Europe, as well as Turkey and Iran, seeing these regions and countries as potential victims of “Communist expansion.” Since the fall of 1945, the United States, not the Soviet Union, had acted as the defining factor in global international relations. And by 1946, the Truman administration decided to contain the Soviet Union, dramatically changing the outlines of international relations. The Americans were already moving toward confrontation, not cooperation, with the Soviet Union. The possibilities of success for Stalin’s great power games began to diminish.

The Soviet Union still enjoyed enormous authority and had many millions of friends in the West.<sup>73</sup> Yet the most influential friends were gone. Roosevelt’s death and the subsequent departure of Harry Hopkins, Henry Morgenthau, Harold Ickes, and the other New Dealers forever ended the Soviet Union’s “spe-

cial relations” with the United States. The last ally Stalin had in the U.S. government was Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace, who took a bold stand for continuing the wartime cooperation with Moscow. In fact, there was communication between Wallace and the Kremlin dictator. In late October 1945, Wallace used the NKGB’s station chief in Washington to communicate the following message to Stalin: “Truman was a petty politician who reached his current post by accident. He often has ‘good’ intentions but too easily falls under the influence of people around him.” Wallace described himself as “fighting for Truman’s soul” with a very powerful group that included Byrnes. That group, he alleged, was extremely anti-Soviet; they “advance an idea of a dominating Anglo-Saxon bloc consisting mainly of the U.S. and England” confronting the “extremely hostile Slavic world” led by the Soviet Union. Wallace offered to play the role of Soviet “agent of influence” in the United States. He pleaded with Stalin to help him and his supporters.<sup>74</sup>

The NKGB transmitted this extraordinary appeal to Stalin. His reaction is unknown. In any case, Stalin was not about to alter his international behavior to help Wallace and American leftists. Nevertheless, he expected to use Wallace and his friends in his struggle for American public opinion against Byrnes and other adversaries.

We also do not know how Stalin reacted to the analytical and intelligence feedback regarding American attitudes toward the Soviet Union. In fall 1945, Igor Gouzenko, Soviet cipher clerk in Ottawa, and Elizabeth Bentley, an American citizen running a ring of Soviet spies in the United States, defected and told Canadian intelligence and the FBI about Soviet intelligence activities in North America. These defections produced a snowball effect in the following months. They led not only to a rapid heightening in the anti-Soviet mood in Canada and the United States but also to the blackout in Soviet intelligence efforts in these countries. The NKGB and GRU hierarchies delayed informing Stalin, Molotov, and Beria about their intelligence failures until the end of November. Meanwhile, as historian Allen Weinstein and journalist Alexander Vassiliev discovered, Bentley’s defection “managed virtually overnight to freeze all active NKGB intelligence activity in the United States.” Fearful for their remaining intelligence assets, the NKGB froze all contacts with an extremely valuable British agent in Washington, “Homer” (Donald Maclean). The GRU probably did the same with its networks.<sup>75</sup> Thus, American policy-making circles suddenly became more opaque to Stalin, just at the moment when the rapid switch to the policy of containment occurred.

Despite the effect of the Gouzenko affair, Stalin knew about the rapid tough-



ening of the U.S. stance toward the Soviet Union. Soviet intelligence, according to Russian historian Vladimir Pechatnov, eventually picked up a copy of Kennan's "long telegram" in Washington. Stalin and Molotov also understood the geostrategic implications of a U.S.-British alliance: a combination of American economic potential and atomic power and the British empire's military bases around the globe led to a dangerous encirclement of the Soviet Union. Yet this knowledge ultimately did little to alter Stalin's decisions. Pechatnov wonders if Stalin was aware "of the connection between his own actions and a growing resistance to them." The answer is, probably not.<sup>76</sup>

Stalin assumed that the other powers would remain selfish, scheming, and quarrelsome, in accordance with the Leninist concept of imperialism. When Stalin assessed his Western opponents, he did it based on his notion of their "imperialist" nature and logic. When the Labour government in London did not show consistency in this regard, Stalin heaped scorn on them. Ernest Bevin and Clement Attlee, he said in November 1945, "are great fools; they have the power in a great country and they don't know what to do with it. They are empirically oriented."<sup>77</sup> Stalin's contempt for Bevin contrasted with his attitude, ranging from respect to cold fury, toward Churchill.

Ideological influences, as John Lewis Gaddis has noted, explained Stalin's expansionism and his belief that the Soviet Union could get away with it. In particular, Stalin's expectation of an inevitable postwar economic crisis and his belief in "imperialist contradictions" among capitalist states made him dismiss the possibility of Western cooperation.<sup>78</sup> Also, Stalin's expansionism was linked to his domestic politics of mobilization, which included Russo-centric propaganda and his appeal to other forms of nationalism. Nationalist sentiments and aspirations among Soviet elites and the broader public gave domestic support for the Kremlin's policies of "socialist imperialism" in 1945-46.

It is not possible to determine whether Stalin expected that his toughness in the Balkans and his probing in Turkey and Iran would provoke a rupture with the Western allies. It is clear, though, that Stalin's actions helped pave the way for the Cold War. His tactics in the Middle East helped to bring about a postwar cooperation between Great Britain and the United States and made U.S. administrations react harshly to "Soviet expansionism." Stalin's assumptions played a trick on him. Stalin was brutally effective inasmuch as his territorial and political goals could be supported by the force of the Soviet army. However, as a diplomatic and public relations practice, this stance was disastrous, just as Litvinov had feared. Without adequate feedback about his own failures, he persevered in the course that helped to turn the tension between the USSR and the United States into a full-

scale confrontation. And, later, his black-and-white worldview, faith in brute force, and Marxist-Leninist ideological baggage left him without any alternative to the Cold War and the unilateral mobilization of Soviet economic and military power.

The new American global power and the determination of the Truman administration to use it was an independent factor. The United States, many historians agree, began to act as a global power not only in response to the Soviet challenge but also according to its own blueprint for the world. The post-Wilsonian program to build a "free and democratic" Europe and contain Communism elsewhere was a new revolutionary factor that was fundamentally changing foreign affairs. And there were powerful forces in American political circles and society that had always believed, as W. R. Smyser concludes, that "only [the United States] could have interest and forces all around the world." In the minds of these thinkers, for the postwar peace the Soviet Union could have a regional role but could not play the role of a truly great power.<sup>79</sup> At the same time, one wonders if these forces would have had their way and if the United States would have moved to center stage in world politics so rapidly without the "help" of the Soviet threat and Stalin's actions.

Stalin's extrapolation of the lessons of *European* international relations during the previous century kept his mind closed to the motives behind *American* global interventionism. Stalin could foresee the end of American isolationism, but he failed to give credence to the huge impulse behind the ideas of the "American century," which, couched in multilateral language, drove the United States to stay in Europe. Until the fall of 1945, Stalin received many benefits from his partnership with Washington. His experience dealing with Americans led him to believe he could squeeze out other marginal gains without encountering U.S. resistance, so long as the Soviet actions targeted the British spheres of influence. Much to Stalin's surprise, the Truman administration decided that there was no alternative to containment of Soviet expansionism in every part of the world, including Central Europe. This decision set the stage for decades of Cold War.

Stalin did avoid one huge mistake. He never openly posed as an aggressor and carefully preserved the veneer of international legitimacy on his expansionism. The Soviet leader left to the West the role of breaking the agreements of Yalta and Potsdam and starting a confrontation. Later, Molotov could claim: "What does the 'cold war' mean? We were simply on the offensive. They became angry at us, of course, but we had to consolidate what we conquered."<sup>80</sup> The majority of Soviet citizens shared this perception. For decades to come, they would continue to believe that not Stalin but the United States had unleashed the Cold War.

## DOMESTIC "COLD WAR" BEGINS

Stalin feared that the effect of Hiroshima, combined with the overall sense of anxiety and fatigue after the war, could cause Soviet elites to seek an accommodation with the United States, perhaps even an acceptance of U.S. superiority. Molotov's "softness" during the London conference made him a target of Stalin's anger and suspicion.<sup>81</sup> Back in Moscow in early October 1945, Molotov had to admit his errors before his own subordinates at the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs. He described the conference as a battlefield where "certain American and British quarters" launched the first "diplomatic attack on the foreign policy gains of the Soviet Union."<sup>82</sup>

This was just the beginning of Molotov's troubles. In early October, Stalin left for a vacation on the Black Sea—his first in many years. The war had greatly aged the Kremlin leader, and foreign journalists began to speculate about Stalin's ill health and possible retirement. They even named Molotov and Zhukov as his successors. Reading press dispatches, Stalin began to suspect that his closest lieutenants (Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, and Mikoyan) might no longer need his leadership and would not be averse to accommodating the United States and Great Britain behind his back. Stalin was incensed when he read that Molotov, speaking at a reception for foreign journalists, hinted at the forthcoming relaxation of state censorship on world media. In a coded telegram, Stalin lashed out at Molotov's "liberalism and ad-libbing." He blamed his lieutenant for attempting to carry out a policy of "concessions to Anglo-Americans," to "give foreigners an impression that he had his own policy distinct from the policy of the Government and Stalin, the impression that with him, Molotov, [the West] could do business." By one stroke of a pen he excluded Molotov from the narrow circle of leadership and proposed to Beria, Malenkov, and Mikoyan the removal of Molotov from his positions as first deputy to Stalin and foreign minister. The attempt of other lieutenants to defend Molotov infuriated Stalin even more. After some time and Molotov's pleas for mercy, Stalin agreed to put his old friend Vyacheslav on probation and authorized him to continue negotiations with Byrnes.<sup>83</sup>

While Stalin was planting the mine under Molotov, he cracked his whip over all his lieutenants. He wrote to them: "There are now many in seats of authority who wax ecstatic like children when hearing praises of the Churchills, the Trumans, and the Byrnes and, conversely, losing their heart after unfavorable references from these misters. As I see it, these are dangerous attitudes, since they spawn in our ranks servility before foreign figures. Against this servility before foreigners we must fight tooth and nail."<sup>84</sup> This cable contained the gist of the ideological campaign of xenophobic isolationism that would erupt in a few

months. This campaign would force all Stalin's subordinates to reconfirm their loyalty and zeal on the new front, uprooting the mood of "kowtowing before the West" allegedly present in the Soviet state apparatus and society.

Had Stalin died at that moment, his colleagues might have chosen a more accommodating course toward the United States. They lacked his unique talent for doom scenarios; they also shared the nomenklatura's preference that life after the war should be less demanding. As their actions after 1953 would demonstrate, they did not and could not ignore, as Stalin did, the country's exhaustion and misery. Still, Stalin's subordinates were prisoners of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm. Xenophobic and isolationist, they were torn between the desire for peaceful reconstruction and the temptations of "socialist imperialism." They wanted cooperation with Western powers, but on Soviet terms, with preservation of Soviet economic autarky and freedom of action.

In the fall of 1945, the Soviet leadership and officials debated if the Soviet Union should join the postwar international economic and financial institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) created at Bretton Woods. Some high officials dealing with state budgets, finances, industries, and trade argued, for pragmatic and economic grounds, for Soviet participation. The commissar of finances, Arseny Zverev, insisted that a Soviet presence in these institutions, even in an observer's capacity, would help in future trade and loan negotiations with the West. This position received support from Mikoyan and Lozovsky. They considered American loans and technology as necessary to Soviet economic recovery. Other officials, including Nikolai Voznesensky, the head of Gosplan, the State Planning Committee, argued that foreign debts would undermine Soviet economic independence. In a memorandum to Molotov in October 1945, Ivan Maisky cautioned that Americans used their loans to the British to open their empire for U.S. economic and financial penetration. Particularly worrisome, he wrote, was American insistence that money would be disbursed under their control and that Great Britain should dismantle its state mechanisms for trade monopoly.<sup>85</sup>

By February 1946, according to Vladimir Pechatnov, isolationist attitudes prevailed inside the Soviet bureaucracy. Some officials appealed "to Stalin's reluctance both to make the Soviet economy more transparent and to deposit part of the Soviet gold reserve" with the International Monetary Fund. Stalin decided not to join the Bretton Woods system. In March, the official correspondence of the finance ministry already stressed the new stance—that the Western powers might interpret a Soviet presence in the international institutions as a sign of Soviet weakness and readiness for unilateral concessions "under US pressure." Molotov, when asked in the 1970s, said that the Americans "were trying to draw us into

their company, but in the subordinate role. We would have got into the position of dependence, and still would not have obtained anything from them.”<sup>86</sup>

The Generalissimo used the occasion of the first postwar “elections” for the Supreme Soviet to set new guidelines for the Communist Party and state cadres on February 9, 1946, in the Bolshoi Theater. Stalin’s speech, infused with ideological language, announced an unabashedly unilateralist postwar course. For many observers, it meant a final break with the spirit of the Grand Alliance; there was not a single friendly word in the speech to the Western powers. The speech commanded the officials in the audience to convert the Soviet Union into a superpower in one decade, “to surpass in the near future the achievements of science beyond the borders of our country” (a hint at the future atomic-missile race), and to “increase the level of our industry, for instance, threefold in comparison with the pre-war level.” This, the speech concluded, would be the only condition that would ensure Soviet security “against any eventualities.” Stalin wrote the speech himself, edited it several times, and even prescribed the audience’s reaction by inserting the words “furious applause,” “applause and standing ovation,” and so on, in the speech draft after the key paragraphs.<sup>87</sup> The speech was broadcast on the radio and printed in tens of millions of copies. Shrewd listeners and readers immediately recognized it as a death knell to hopes of a better life, as well as postwar cooperation with Western allies. Stalin ordered the nomenklatura to make another big leap forward.<sup>88</sup>

The new course, in effect, transformed the postwar period into a time of mobilization and preparation for future lethal “eventualities.” The official statistics show the drop in military expenditures, from 128.7 billion rubles in 1945 to 73.7 billion rubles in 1946. They remained at this level, which was higher than the prewar level, in 1947 as well. This figure did not include the costs of the atomic project, which came from the “special” funds of the state. The plans for 1946 also included forty new naval bases. The consumer-oriented sectors of the economy, above all agriculture, remained in a disastrous condition, as the official estimate from Finance Minister Zverev to Stalin in October 1946 indicated.<sup>89</sup>

	1940	1942	1944	1945
Wheat (in millions of tons)	24.0	12.1	10.0	11.0
Wool (in thousands of tons)	1,417	672	516	624
Wool (in thousands of tons)	228	111	106	117
Wool (in thousands of tons)	2,181	114	245	465
Wool (in thousands of tons)	183.0	54.0	47.0	50.0
Wool (in thousands of tons)	211.0	52.7	67.4	66.1

The living standards of the Soviet people, the victors, plummeted to a level below that of the vanquished Germans. During the war, the state had requisitioned a large part of people’s incomes through the enforced purchase of war bonds, semivoluntary donations, and indirect taxes. Inflation did additional damage.<sup>90</sup> The prewar living standard, already very low, looked by 1946 like an unreachable dream.

Churchill’s iron curtain speech supplied Stalin with another excellent opportunity for preparing Soviet citizens for the life of destitution and hunger ahead. In his reply in *Pravda* on March 14, 1946, personally drafted and carefully edited, Stalin called the former British ally “a warmonger,” compared him to Hitler, and contrasted Soviet “internationalism” with Churchill’s search for “racist” Anglo-Saxon world domination. The harshness of the response was calculated: in this way, Stalin indicated his uncompromising attitude toward any Western attempt to challenge the Soviet sphere of influence in Central Europe. The common public wish from now on would not be cooperation with the Western powers but the prevention of war with them. This fear was exactly what Stalin needed to promote his mobilization campaign.<sup>91</sup>

Stalin put Andrei Zhdanov in charge of the mobilization campaign (known as *Zhdanovshchina*). Zhdanov had not excelled in his wartime role as Leningrad’s party chief, yet his background made him good enough for the propaganda job. He came from a well-educated family—his father, like Lenin’s father, was an inspector of public schools, and his mother belonged to the nobility and had graduated from the Moscow Conservatory. He was cultured and a good speaker. In April 1946, Zhdanov transmitted “the order of comrade Stalin” to the central party apparatus and propagandists: to refute decisively the assumption that “people should take some time to recover after the war, etc.”<sup>92</sup>

Another target of Stalin’s campaign was war commanders. The Kremlin leader suspected the conquerors of Europe of Bonapartist tendencies. Stalin wanted to whip them into shape as the mass demobilization continued. By September 1946, the strength of the Soviet army had dropped, according to American intelligence estimates, from a peak of 12.5 million to 4.5 million.<sup>93</sup> Meanwhile, the military elite was resting on its laurels, and its combat spirit evaporated in the orgy of drinking, womanizing, and expropriations. In March 1946, a first tentative purge was carried out of the top echelon of “the generation of victors.” A number of military leaders, state managers, and engineers were framed in the “affair of the aircraft industry.” General Alexei Shakhurin, commissar of the aircraft-building industry, and marshal of aviation Alexander Novikov, commander in chief of the Soviet air force, were abruptly fired and then arrested on trumped-up charges of arming the Red Army with “flawed” aircraft.<sup>94</sup>

At the same time, Stalin's military counterintelligence "discovered" that Marshal Georgy Zhukov had brought carloads of goods and treasures from Germany for his household and personal use. Now the Soviet national hero, who led the Victory Parade on a white stallion, went into semiexile as commander of the 15th Army in the Leningrad military district.<sup>95</sup> At the same time, Georgy Malenkov, Stalin's loyal lieutenant, who had been in charge of the aircraft industry during the war, lost his positions in the Party Secretariat and the Organizational Bureau (he, however, was quickly pardoned by Stalin). What the dictator wanted was to demonstrate that war accomplishments did not protect against purges. Adding insult to injury to the veterans and for millions of others, in late 1946, Stalin cancelled the public celebration and the national holiday on Victory Day; instead, people got a day off on New Year's Day.

Some downgraded veterans woke up to the horrid realities of Stalin's rule. It was at this time that the NKGB began to monitor all Soviet military leaders, and some of these conversations have now reached historians. These records include private conversations between army general Vasily Gordov and his former chief of staff, General Fedor Rybalchenko, on New Year's Eve in 1946. Gordov, a ruthless army commander at Stalingrad, Berlin, and Prague, was one of Zhukov's sympathizers and lost his high position. Anger and alcohol loosened the tongues of both generals. They agreed that people in the West lived incomparably better than Soviet people, and that life in the countryside was downright miserable. Rybalchenko said that "people are angry about their life and complain openly, on trains and everywhere. Famine is unbelievable, but newspapers just lie. Only the government lives well, while people are starving." Gordov wondered aloud if there was a way to work and live abroad ("in Finland or in Scandinavian countries"). The generals regretted the absence of Western assistance and feared that Stalin's policy of confrontation with the Anglo-American bloc would end up in war and Soviet defeat. Rybalchenko concluded: "I think before ten years elapse they will whip our ass. Everybody says there would be a war. Our prestige has been declining abominably! Nobody will support the Soviet Union."<sup>96</sup>

The discontented military was fully aware of Stalin's role in instigating new purges. When Rybalchenko proposed that Gordov should beg Stalin for forgiveness, the latter only scoffed at this proposal. He exclaimed with pride, characteristic of the postwar elite: "Why should I go and debase myself?" Three days later, alone with his wife, Gordov confessed that his trip to the countryside before his "elections" as a deputy of the Supreme Soviet) made him "completely born." "I am convinced that if today we disband collective farms, tomorrow

there will be order, market, everything in abundance. People should be left alone; they have the right to live better lives. They won these rights in the battle!" Stalin, concluded Gordov, "ruined Russia."<sup>97</sup>

Such criticism of Stalin among Soviet elites was still rare.<sup>98</sup> But discontent was growing by the end of 1946, when a severe drought struck the most fertile lands in Ukraine, Crimea, Moldova, the Volga region, and the central region of Russia, the Far East, Siberia, and Kazakhstan. This natural calamity, combined with the lack of manpower and resources after the war, created the danger of mass famine.<sup>99</sup> But it was Stalin and his policies that, instead of averting famine, caused this man-made catastrophe, similar to the famine of 1932-33.

As in the 1930s, Stalin refused to admit that a disaster was taking place and preferred to denounce "wreckers" and "speculators," who were allegedly responsible for the bread shortage. The Kremlin leader had huge "strategic" grain reserves that he had ruthlessly accumulated for war needs. Now he refused to release this grain for consumption. Stalin also had 1,500 tons of gold in state coffers to buy food abroad. Molotov and Mikoyan later recalled that Stalin banned the sale of gold. He even rejected food assistance from the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration to Russia (while allowing some assistance to Ukraine and White Russia). At the same time he pledged to send Soviet food to Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as to French and Italian Communists.<sup>100</sup>

Stalin returned to the prewar policy of impoverishing the Soviet people, especially the peasantry and agricultural workers, in order to provide money for industrial rebuilding and rearmament. Between 1946 and 1948, taxes on peasants increased by 30 percent, and by 1950 they had jumped by 150 percent. The state also refused to pay back the war bonds, billions of rubles that had been "borrowed," in fact confiscated, from the Soviet people. Instead, new reconstruction bonds were imposed on the struggling citizenry.<sup>101</sup>

Stalin certainly knew how many people resented the authorities and him personally. But he also knew that only the elite presented a real danger. Mikoyan recalled: Stalin "knew that the main feature of the Russian muzhik was his patience and endurance."<sup>102</sup> The purges that aimed at undermining the elites' pride and autonomy gradually turned into a new round of terror against them. In 1945 and 1946, there was a decline in the number of indictments by the NKVD's Special Commission, from 26,600 to 8,000, but by 1949 the level had jumped to 38,500.<sup>103</sup> In January 1947, General Gordov, his wife, and General Rybalchenko were arrested and imprisoned, along with other military figures and their family members.<sup>104</sup> The purges were still limited, and they proceeded very quietly, without public denunciations. But within a couple of years, when the Cold War

olarized the world and Stalin's position became unshakeable, the Kremlin dictator began to spill the elites' blood on a growing scale.

### STALIN "CONSOLIDATES" SOVIET SOCIETY

Forman Naimark observes that "war provides cover for rulers to carry out projects of ethnic cleansing" and "provides the opportunity to deal with a troublesome minority by suspending civil law." For Stalin, the growing confrontation with the West provided a chance to restore full control over the elites. It also gave him a justification for the Russification of Soviet elites and bureaucracy and the consolidation of Soviet society with the help of strong nationalist themes and a rigid ethnic hierarchy.<sup>105</sup>

The campaign against "cosmopolitanism," an official cover for anti-Semitic policies, was a major part of this consolidation. Stalin's suspicion of Jews began to grow with the onset of the Cold War. He began to imagine a conspiracy of Soviet Jewish elites, Jewish organizations in the United States, and Jews in his immediate entourage. Since the 1920s, many Politburo members, including Molotov, Voroshilov, Mikhail Kalinin, and Andrei Andreev, had married Jewish women, and now this began to feed Stalin's suspicions.<sup>106</sup> In 1946, Zhdanov passed Stalin's order down through the ranks: accelerate the removal of "cosmopolitan" cadres, primarily ethnic Jews, from the Soviet bureaucracy, including from the key positions of Soviet propaganda, ideology, and culture. The first blow, reflecting the new priorities, was against the Soviet Information Bureau (Sovinformburo), the voice, known throughout the world, of Kremlin wartime propaganda. Zhdanov bluntly told the official who had trouble understanding precisely who the cosmopolitan enemy was in his agency to "get rid of the synagogue there." Soviet Jews had served the Soviet regime, filling the ranks of the professional and cultural elite for two decades. Now it was time to purge them.<sup>107</sup>

In spring 1948, prominent Zionists appealed to Moscow to send "fifty thousand" Soviet Jews as "volunteers" to Palestine to help them against the Arabs, promising, in return, sympathy to Soviet interests. Soviet officials and experts on the Middle East reacted with great skepticism; the prevalent view was that the mass nature of Zionism would definitely put Zionists on the side of the United States, not the USSR. Surprisingly, despite his growing anti-Semitism, Stalin overruled the skeptics and authorized massive military assistance to the Zionists through Czechoslovakia. In May 1948, even before the war in Palestine ended, the Soviet Union recognized the state of Israel de jure, even before the United States had done so. Molotov asserted in the 1970s that "everybody, except Stalin and

myself," had been against this decision. He explained that to avoid recognizing Israel would have allowed the enemies of the USSR to depict it as opposed to Jewish national self-determination.<sup>108</sup> But more probably, Stalin concluded that supporting the Zionist movement could be his only tool to weaken British influence in the Middle East. Also, he must have hoped to exacerbate the British-American tensions over Zionism and even to gain access to the Mediterranean.<sup>109</sup>

However, Israel, as most experts predicted, quickly began to lean on the United States. Also, the phenomenal show of support for Israel among world Jewry, including Soviet Jews, startled the Kremlin leader. Even Voroshilov's wife, Ekaterina (Golda Gorbman), said to his relatives on the day Israel was proclaimed: "Now we have our own country, too." The Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee (JAFC) had already become in Stalin's eyes the hotbed of Jewish nationalism connected to Zionist circles in the United States and Israel. Stalin knew that many Soviet Jews saw the head of the JAFC, the famous actor Solomon Mikhoels, as their informal national leader. At the end of the war, they appealed to Molotov, his wife, Polina Zhemchuzhina, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich to help set up a Jewish republic in Crimea. Even before the recognition of Israel, the dictator began to take measures to eliminate what he imagined as a potential Zionist conspiracy inside the Soviet Union. In January 1948, the MGB (the successor to the NKGB), at Stalin's order, killed Mikhoels, staging it as a road accident. By the end of 1948, other leaders of the JAFC were arrested and interrogated. Among many other things, they were accused of an alleged plot to turn Crimea into a Zionist-American beachhead inside the Soviet Union. In January 1949, Molotov's deputy, Lozovsky, the former head of the Sovinformburo and the political supervisor of the JAFC, was arrested. Molotov's wife was also arrested. Molotov recalled that "his knees began to shake," when Stalin read at the Politburo the materials collected against Polina Zhemchuzhina. The same fate befell the wives of Soviet "President" Mikhail Kalinin and of Alexander Poskrebyshv, Stalin's personal secretary.<sup>110</sup> These, as it turned out, were only the first steps toward a colossal campaign against a "Zionist conspiracy" that culminated shortly before Stalin's death with the arrests of the "Kremlin doctors affair" and the announcement that these doctors allegedly prepared, on the instructions of an American Zionist center, the assassination of Soviet political and military leaders. Soviet Jews, including many in the Soviet bureaucracy and cultural elites, expected imminent arrest and deportation to Siberia.<sup>111</sup>

The central role of Crimea in the JAFC case indicated Stalin's continuing obsession with the southern flank of the Soviet Union and unsuccessful pressures on Turkey and Iran. In 1947-48, Turkey became a recipient of American financial and military assistance and a key American regional ally. Iran was mov-

g in the same direction. Meanwhile, Stalin's unfulfilled promises to the peoples of South Caucasus began to backfire as well. The Communists of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, all Stalin's appointees, acted like quarrelling housewives in a communal kitchen. After the dream of returning "ancestral lands" in Turkey did not materialize, the leaders of Georgia and Armenia began to scheme against Azerbaijan. Armenia's party secretary, Grigory Arutynov, complained that he had no room to settle and resources to feed the repatriates (although, instead of the projected 400,000 Armenians, only 90,000 arrived in Soviet Armenia). He proposed to resettle Azeri peasants, living on Armenian territory, in Azerbaijan. He also suggested transferring Nagorny Karabagh, a hilly area historically disputed between the Azeris and the Armenians, from the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan to the Soviet Republic of Armenia. Bagirov responded with counterarguments and counterclaims. Georgians and Armenians hinted to Moscow about the growth of "Armenian nationalism" in the region.<sup>112</sup>

In December 1947, Stalin accepted Arutynov's proposal to resettle Azeri peasants outside of Armenia. However, he did not support the redrawing of the public's borders. And at some point, he decided to resume the "ethnic cleansing" of South Caucasus from suspicious and potentially disloyal elements. In September 1948, a fire on the steamer *Pobeda* (Victory), which was bringing Armenian repatriates, triggered Stalin's suspicions. From his Black Sea dacha he telegraphed to Malenkov: "There are American agents among the repatriates. They prepared a terrorist act on the steamer 'Pobeda.'" On the next day Malenkov telegraphed back: "You are right, of course. We will take all necessary measures." The Politburo immediately passed the order to stop repatriation.<sup>113</sup> In April and May 1949, the Politburo decreed that all "Armenian nationalists" (including some repatriates from all over the world), as well as all "former Turkish citizens" from Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, be deported to Kazakhstan and Siberia. Thousands were also deported. The deportations from South Caucasus in 1944–49 involved 157,000 people.<sup>114</sup> This "cleansing" did not end the nationalist tensions. Still, Stalin managed to bring the regional politics, destabilized by his foreign policy adventures, back under control.

Simultaneously, Stalin delivered a lethal blow to the "Leningraders," meaning those party and state officials from the Russian Federation, especially Leningrad, who had been ethnic Russians and had become popular among the Russian public during the war. These officials hoped that Stalin would continue to rely on them for postwar reconstruction. This group included Nikolai Voznesensky, the Gosplan head; chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Russian Federation and member of the Party Orgburo Mikhail Rodionov; Central Committee secretary and Orgburo member Alexei Kuznetsov; and first secretary of Leningrad's

Communist Party organization Petr Popkov. They were protégés of Andrei Zhdanov and had been in charge of Leningrad's heroic defense during the 900 days of the German siege. Beria and Malenkov, threatened by this group's ascendancy, did everything to compromise the Leningraders in Stalin's eyes and finally succeeded. The Kremlin launched an investigation into the "Leningrad affair," as well as the "Gosplan affair" against Voznesensky. In February and March 1949, Stalin dismissed Voznesensky, Rodionov, Kuznetsov, and Popkov from their positions. After several months, the MGB arrested them, along with another 65 high officials and 145 family members and relatives. The "investigation" used appalling methods of torture. Stalin made the Politburo members, including Malenkov and Minister of Defense Nikolai Bulganin, attend interrogations personally. On October 1, 1950, 23 high officials, including Voznesensky, Rodionov, Kuznetsov, and Popkov, were executed. About the same time, the arrested generals, including Gordov, Rybalchenko, and Grigory Kulik, were also shot.<sup>115</sup>

Within a few short years, Stalin had successfully stolen the glory of victory and the fruits of peace from the Soviet people, victors in World War II. Of course, he could not have done this without the support of millions of willing collaborators, including military and civilian elites. Many war veterans slipped from heroic roles back into the position of "cogs" in the state machinery. They welcomed and supported the transformation of the USSR into a world empire and superpower. Reawakened chauvinism and nationalism and ideological belief in the aggressive hostility of "Western imperialism" toward the Soviet Union—all these factors contributed to the powerful amalgam that made millions of Soviet citizens subscribe in good conscience to Stalin's postwar plans.<sup>116</sup> Many veterans came to regard the Soviet empire and its security buffer of Central Europe as the necessary substitute for bread, happiness, and a comfortable life after victory. They also compensated for the permanent lack of domestic security by projecting their fears outside, by resurrecting the cult of Soviet military power, displaying overt hostility toward the West, and embracing a new anti-Americanism. This became the core of the Soviet collective identity for decades to come.<sup>117</sup>

While appealing to the impulses of Russian chauvinism, state propaganda and the media excoriated Jewish "cosmopolitans." During the purge of Jews from Moscow State University, Anatoly Chernyaev listened to his friend, a war veteran, explaining to him: "For several years the party has been fighting against Jewish domination. It is cleansing itself from the Jews." At this same time, another brave young veteran spoke up against anti-Semitism. He immediately lost his party membership and disappeared from the university.<sup>118</sup> The anti-Semitic purge gave those who supported anti-Semitic policies a false sense of solidarity and power akin to what many Germans had felt under Hitler. Another witness described

uch types: "The war had given them a taste of power. They were incapable of critical thinking. They studied to be masters of life."<sup>119</sup>

At one of the anti-cosmopolitan meetings at Moscow State University, Professor Sergei Dmitriev asked his colleague what the reason for this campaign could be. The answer was: "War. People must be prepared for a new war. And it is approaching."<sup>120</sup> The intensifying Cold War certainly helped Stalin to justify his anti-Semitic campaign, as well as the deportations of Armenians and Greeks, as well as of Ukrainians, Latvians, and Lithuanians. It helped him consolidate the Russian core of his "socialist empire." The winds of a new war also helped Stalin to stamp out any potential discontent and dissent among the elites. The majority of state officials and military officers in the Soviet Union were convinced that the West was on the offensive and had to be contained.

This perception grew when the United States tested two atomic bombs at the Bikini atoll in the Pacific in July 1946. The tests took place just two weeks after the Americans presented their plan of "international control" of atomic energy and on the eve of the Paris Peace Conference (July 29 to October 15, 1946), convened to negotiate the peace treaties with Germany and its satellites. Two Soviet observers witnessed the tests and reported to the Kremlin leadership on its results. One of them, Major General Semen Alexandrov, a geologist and the chief engineer of the uranium explorations for the Soviet atomic project, brought the film of the tests to Moscow and showed it in the Kremlin, as well as to his friends and colleagues.<sup>121</sup>

Few in the Soviet political class had any doubt that the American atomic monopoly had become the tool of U.S. postwar diplomacy and that it threatened Soviet security. Even the most intelligent and sophisticated party members could not escape the forcefulness of Stalin's zero-sum vision of the new postwar situation. Writer Konstantin Simonov experienced the Soviet war saga from the tragic defeats of the summers of 1941 and 1942 to the triumph in Berlin and identified himself with the "generation of victors." In early 1946, the Politburo sent him and a small group of other journalists and writers to the United States on a propaganda mission. The contrast between American affluence and Soviet ruin was almost unbearable for him. He was also disturbed by the first waves of anti-Soviet backlash that lapped on American shores. Upon his return home, Simonov wrote a play, *The Russian Question*, in which U.S. imperialists, politicians, and newspaper magnates seek a preemptive war against the Soviet Union. The play's main character, a progressive American journalist, seeks to denounce this cabal. He travels to the Soviet Union and sees with his own eyes that Russians do not want another war. The play was a crude caricature of American politics and media, but without a doubt Simonov passionately believed in what he wrote. How

could the Soviet Union threaten anyone, when it had suffered so many losses? Yet, at the same time, he was also convinced that without postwar mobilization and reconstruction the Soviet Union would be pushed around and perhaps be crushed by the awesome American power. Stalin liked Simonov's play. *The Russian Question* was serialized in journals, read on radio, and staged on countless stages of the Soviet Union and seen by millions. Ten years later, Simonov still subscribed to the idea that in 1946 the Soviet Union had a stark choice—to grow strong quickly or perish.<sup>122</sup>

Stalin's goal was a "socialist empire," invincible and protected on all its flanks. But this project suffered from inherent flaws. Successful empires throughout human history, among them Roman, Chinese, and British, used other factors in addition to naked force to establish control over huge disparate territories. They recruited indigenous elites, often tolerated ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, and promoted free trade and communications.<sup>123</sup> Stalin's socialist empire used powerful ideology, nationalism, and social engineering to refashion society and elites. It introduced the uniformity of state industrialization and party systems. At the same time, it took away civil freedoms, wealth, cooperation, and human dignity and offered instead an illusion of social justice.

The socialist empire exploited the patience, illusions, and suffering of millions of Russians and non-Russians, the people populating its core. It also exploited the faith of millions of true believers in Communism in Europe and Asia, where Marxism-Leninism played the role of a secular religion. This pyramid of faith and illusions was crowned by the cult of Stalin himself, the infallible leader. The leader, however, was mortal: inevitably, Stalin's death would produce a crisis of legitimacy and a succession struggle among his heirs.

Most important, the Soviet Union faced a confident and dynamic rival in the West. The United States, with its financial, economic, and military power, helped to rebuild the countries of Western Europe and Japan as free market economies and mass consumption societies. The struggle against the West left Stalin no opportunity to prevail. This became most painfully clear in Germany, where the Soviets confronted major problems when they tried to turn their zone of occupation into the linchpin of their empire in Central Europe.

**( CHAPTER 3 )**  
**STALEMATE IN GERMANY,**  
**1945-1953**



All we need is a bourgeois Germany if it is peaceful.

—Beria, May 1953

How could a sober-thinking Marxist, one who stands on the positions close to socialism or Soviet power, believe in a bourgeois, peaceful Germany . . . that would be under the control of four powers?

—Molotov, July 1953

Germany's division was one of the most striking outcomes of the clash between the Soviet Union and the Western democracies. But only recently has critical reassessment of Western involvement emerged.<sup>1</sup> And the full extent of Stalin's role cannot be documented even today. The details of many smaller-scale decisions and their implementation remain clouded: Stalin's cipher cables and many records of conversations are still classified in the Russian archives. Nevertheless, the available documents reveal that many developments in East Germany had Stalin's unique imprint and some of them would never have taken place without his explicit authorization. The top Soviet political commissar in East Germany, Vladimir Semenov, recalled in the 1960s the "subtle diplomatic moves" that Stalin made in pursuing Soviet policy on the German Question.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of East German and Soviet archives has convinced some scholars that Stalin would have preferred to build a united non-Communist Germany, not to create a separate East German satellite.<sup>3</sup> Some experts believe that the Soviets had never intended the Sovietization of East Germany but rather stumbled into it in the chaotic process of improvisation.<sup>4</sup> My conclusions in this chapter are just the opposite. Evidence shows that Stalin and Soviet elites never entertained the idea of a neutral Germany. At a minimum, the Soviets wanted to neutralize the part of Germany under Western control and build their own socialist Germany in their zone of occupation. From the ideological angle, building socialism in the Eastern Zone brought together the Bolshevik internationalist dreams of the 1920s and the acquisition of the empire during the 1940s.

From the economic standpoint, the zone became the source of an enormous

flow of reparations, of self-enrichment for Soviet elites, of high technologies for industrialists and scientists, and of almost the entire supply of weapons-grade uranium for Soviet nuclear arms. The division of Germany was also an excellent pretext for constructing a socialist empire in Central Europe. World War II left Soviet elites and the citizenry feeling entitled to have a decisive say in Germany's future. This sentiment, justified by the enormous war casualties, lasted for decades.

Last, but not least, Stalin never wanted to withdraw Soviet troops from East Germany. As the confrontation deepened, East Germany became a true hub—militarily and geostrategically—of Soviet power in Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops ended up being deployed there, ready to rush, at a moment's notice, all the way to the English Channel.

As it turned out, East Germany became the most troubled link of the Soviet empire. As an "expert on nationalities," Stalin was careful not to reinvigorate the forces of German nationalism; he felt it was vital to blame the split of the German nation on the Western powers. Thus, the Soviets concealed the gradual integration of East Germany into the Soviet empire, leaving the border between East and West Germany open. These circumstances turned Germany into a place of relatively open competition between free market and Communist systems. In the early occupation years, Soviet authorities seemed to be successful in consolidating "their Germany." By the end of Stalin's life, however, it became clear that the struggle for the pivotal country of Europe was just beginning and that the Soviets could not win it.

#### ESTABLISHING THE OCCUPATION REGIME

The Soviet authorities planned for occupation, documents suggest, beginning in 1943, well before the first Soviet soldier entered East Prussia. Yet, understandably, those plans were quite vague. Ivan Maisky wrote in his private journal: "Our goal is to prevent the emergence of a new German aggression." This could be achieved, if not by "proletarian revolution" and the "creation in Germany of a strong Soviet regime," then only by the "substantial and durable weakening of Germany that would render it physically incapable of any aggression."<sup>5</sup> Twenty years later, Marshal Rodion Malinovsky and Marshal Sergei Biryuzov stated that they believed that it was Stalin's intention to destroy the German economy in 1945: "He did not believe that we would stay in Germany, and he was afraid that it all would turn once more against us."<sup>6</sup>

Stalin, always suspicious of Western intentions, wanted to prevent a last-minute alliance between Germany and the Western powers. At the Yalta con-



ce, he even did not want to reveal the Soviet Union's extremely strong est in reparations.<sup>7</sup> According to Maisky, Stalin "did not want to scare the s with our demands and make them interested in new opportunities." He played down Soviet plans to use German POWs as forced labor to rebuild at cities and the economy.<sup>8</sup> In reality, Soviet interest in economic exploitation ermany was enormous. On May 11, 1945, Stalin instructed Malenkov, Molo-Gosplan head Nikolai Voznesensky, Maisky, and other officials that the trans- of Germany's military-industrial potential to the Soviet Union must be carried with maximum speed to ensure economic recovery of the industrialized s, "particularly [the coal mines of] Donbass." During the discussion, Molo-stressed that the Soviets must strip West Berlin of all its industrial assets ore its transfer to the Western powers. "Berlin cost us too much."<sup>9</sup>

At the end of the war, the Kremlin's plans for the future of Germany centered ve all on the issues of borders and occupation.<sup>10</sup> Stalin and his lieutenants rew the map of Germany and erased Prussia, "the hornet's nest of German itarism," from the map. The eastern part of Prussia with the city of Königs-g became part of the Soviet Union. The western part and the city of Danzig nt to the reconstituted Poland. Stalin also decided to transfer to Poland the rman lands of Silesia and Pomerania, in compensation for the eastern Polish ds that the Soviet Union had annexed in 1939 and retained at the end of the r. The Soviets encouraged the Poles and the Czechs to expel ethnic Germans. e Western allies did not object. Overall, by the end of 1945, 3.6 million German igees had moved from Eastern Europe to the Soviet zone of occupation; ndreds of thousands fled to the Western zones. It was an awesome geopolitical up that changed the map of Central Europe.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the initial cooperative stance of the Western powers, Stalin braced for struggle for Germany. In late March 1945, he told a group of visiting Czecho-ovak officials that the Western allies would "conspire" with the Germans. ey would try to rescue them from punishment for their crimes, would treat em "more leniently."<sup>12</sup> In May 1945, Stalin said that "the battle for Germany's ul" would be "protracted and difficult."<sup>13</sup> And at a June 4, 1945, meeting with erman Communists, Stalin advised them that the British and the Americans lanned to dismember Germany, but that he, Stalin, was against it. Still, he said, there will be two Germanys in spite of all the unity of the allies." To occupy a trong position in German politics, Stalin urged German Communists to merge ith Social Democrats and become the party of "German unity" that could reach ut to Western zones. The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (the SED) was estab-lished in the Soviet zone in February 1946.<sup>14</sup>

Not indigenous Communists but instead the Soviet Military Administration in

Germany (SMAG) became the crucial agency for pursuing Soviet objectives in Germany. In early 1946, SMAG had already emerged as a sprawling bureaucracy in the growing competition with Western occupational authorities. The SMAG apparatus amounted to 4,000 officers, who had privileges appropriate to "imperial administration" in a colony: a double salary in Soviet rubles and German marks; a better living standard than the highest bureaucrats in the Soviet Union; a position from which to lord it over the former "master race" of Europe; and exposure to various influences from Western zones. The Kremlin leader had the two rival secret police agencies, the MVD and the MGB, help SMAG and provide Stalin with a check on its activities.<sup>15</sup>

Marshal Georgy Zhukov, the first head of SMAG, quickly lost his job: his immense popularity, combined with a headstrong character, bothered Stalin. His successor, Marshal Vasily Sokolovsky, was the most sophisticated, cultured, and at the same time modest and unassuming person in the Soviet military command.<sup>16</sup> Stalin also instituted the position of political commissar in Germany. In February 1946, this job went to Vladimir Semenov, a thirty-four-year-old doctor of philosophy and a middle-ranking diplomat; nothing in his past life prepared him for the enormity of his task. His first reaction was to study archival documents on the history of Napoleon's occupation of the German states in the early nineteenth century. Unfortunately for the young appointee, history gave him no insights for future activities.<sup>17</sup>

The uncertainty of the political situation in Germany and in relationship to the Western powers made Stalin deliberately cautious and vague in his instructions to SMAG and Semenov. While Stalin had no doubt there would be a struggle for Germany, he was uncertain about the degree of American involvement. In October 1944, in conversation with Stalin, Churchill said that the "Americans probably have no intention to participate in a long-term occupation [of Germany]."<sup>18</sup> But numerous events since fall 1945 signaled the American intention to stay in Germany. The new assertiveness of the United States after Hiroshima indicated to Moscow that the Americans wanted to challenge Soviet control over Central Europe and the Balkans. From that moment on, the issue for Stalin was not so much the presence of American military power in Germany but rather the maintenance of the Soviet military presence in Central Europe, above all in the Eastern Zone.

In September 1945, Stalin rejected the proposal by U.S. secretary of state James Byrnes to sign a treaty that would demilitarize Germany for twenty to twenty-five years. During his talks with Byrnes in Moscow in December 1945, Stalin, pleased with the American decision to preserve the Yalta-Potsdam formula of cooperation, decided to agree "in principle" to discuss the idea of German

militarization. It was a tactical move. Stalin's strong opposition to Byrnes's plan remained in force. Moreover, it came to be shared by the majority in Soviet high echelons. And it became obvious in February 1946, when Byrnes presented the Soviets a draft agreement on demilitarization of Germany. Stalin and Soviet officials debated this proposal for months. In May 1946, thirty-eight officials, including Politburo members, military, and diplomats, presented their conclusions to Stalin.<sup>19</sup> Zhukov wrote: "Americans would like to finish the occupation of Germany as soon as possible and to remove the armed forces of the USSR, and then to demand a withdrawal of our troops from Poland, and then from the Balkans." They also wanted to disrupt the Soviets in the dismantling of German industries and extraction of reparations and "to preserve in Germany the military potential as a necessary base for carrying out their aggressive aims in the future."<sup>20</sup> Deputy Foreign Minister Solomon Lozovsky was even more categorical in his memorandum. Acceptance of the American project, he wrote, would lead to liquidation of the occupational zones, withdrawal of Soviet troops, and economic and political reunification of Germany under American domination. This, in turn, would lead "in a few years to a German-Anglo-American war against the USSR." A summary prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that in presenting the proposal on German demilitarization, the U.S. government pursued the following goals: bringing an end to German occupation; terminating Soviet reparations from Germany; dismantling the Yalta-Potsdam formula and reducing Soviet control over Germany and Soviet influence in European affairs; accelerating restoration of Germany's economic power; and turning Germany against the Soviet Union. These conclusions became a standard formula in diplomatic correspondence evaluating American foreign policy.<sup>21</sup>

Nowhere in Soviet documents on Germany can one see any trace of a fundamental rethinking of Soviet security considerations in view of American atomic capabilities. Yet, undoubtedly, the shadow of Hiroshima's atomic mushroom was present in Soviet thinking on the German Question. Molotov, in a conversation with Byrnes on May 5, 1946, wondered why the United States "leaves no corner in the world without attention" and "builds its air bases everywhere," including Iceland, Greece, Italy, Turkey, and China.<sup>22</sup> From those bases, as Stalin, Molotov, and the Soviet military saw it, American bombers with atomic weapons could easily strike any spot in the Soviet Union. Later, in the early 1950s, this factor could drive a huge increase in the Soviet military presence in Central Europe in order to counteract a possible U.S. nuclear attack.

Stalin and Soviet high officials agreed that an early military withdrawal from Germany would deny the Soviet Union the right to keep its troops in Central Europe and the Balkans. Then the devastated Germany and other countries of

Central Europe would automatically become dependent on American economic and financial assistance and with political strings attached. The best option remaining for the Soviets was the continuation of the joint occupational regime for an indefinite period. Zhukov, Sokolovsky, and Semenov intended "to use the American initiative in any way to tie their hands (and British hands as well) on the German Question in the future."<sup>23</sup> Then, at least, they could hope that the inevitable postwar economic crisis would come and the United States would give up its plans for European hegemony and retreat into isolationism.

The Americans, meanwhile, switched to the "containment" mode and cooled to the idea of cooperating with the Soviets in Germany. Byrnes reached an agreement with Bevin to merge American and British zones into Bizonia. In his speech in Stuttgart on September 6, the secretary of state, accompanied by Republican senator Arthur H. Vandenberg and Democratic senator Tom Connally, said: "We are not withdrawing. We are staying here." In sum, Byrnes proposed that the United States, not the Soviets, should be a major sponsor of Germany's sovereignty and democratic future. In addition to assurance of German sovereignty over the Ruhr and the Rhineland, Byrnes hinted that the United States did not regard the new German border with Poland (the Oder-Neisse line) as irrevocable.<sup>24</sup>

Byrnes's speech reinforced the Soviet official consensus that the U.S. administration wanted to get rid of the Soviet presence in Germany and deny the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in Central Europe. Still, there was room for "softer" and "harder" interpretations. On the "hard-line" flank, Molotov's deputy, Sergei Kavtaradze, wrote that the United States was potentially "the most aggressive state" in the world and wanted to convert Germany into the base of their "dictatorial position in Europe." According to this assessment, the speech was part of the strategic plan aimed at the Soviet Union. Other Foreign Ministry officials wrote that Byrnes wanted to mobilize German "reactionary" nationalism against the Soviet Union, yet they did not characterize American actions as an aggressive plan. Some of them continued to argue that political and diplomatic compromise on the German Question was possible.<sup>25</sup> The official discourse, however, did not provide any clues to the nature of this compromise.

Only Stalin's guidance could ease this problem. The Kremlin potentate discussed German affairs with Molotov, Vyshinsky, Vladimir Dekanozov, Zhukov, Sokolovsky, and other officials. In his instructions to the German Communist leaders Walter Ulbricht and Wilhelm Pieck in February 1946, Stalin used the same language the Bolsheviks had used to chart their political strategies during the Russian revolutions: the "program-minimum" was to preserve a German unity; the "program-maximum" stipulated construction of socialism in Germany along the "democratic road."<sup>26</sup> If one takes this jargon seriously, it meant that Stalin

is prepared to temporize with the Sovietization of the Soviet zone in the hope at Communist influence could spread throughout the rest of Germany. Stalin's two-stage scenario would have made sense, if there had indeed been a postwar economic crisis and the United States had pulled out its troops from West Germany. This, however, did not happen in 1946 or later.

Semenov recalled in his journal that Stalin had met with him and German Communists at least "once in 2–3 months." He also claimed he received instructions directly from Stalin to focus exclusively on major strategic questions and instruct, bit by bit, a new Germany in the Soviet zone. According to him, there are records of "over a hundred" conversations with Stalin on the issues of political strategy in postwar Germany. But the journal of Stalin's visitors shows only eight meetings between the Kremlin ruler and East Germans in the Kremlin, and archival explorations have failed to produce the rest.<sup>27</sup> Since 1946, Stalin's health problems increasingly caused him to delegate German affairs to his lieutenants and the bureaucracy.

The vagueness or even absence of Stalin's instructions is difficult to interpret. It can be explained by the continuing uncertainty of the German Question, but also by other factors. As he often did earlier in his career, the Kremlin leader encouraged political feuds among his subordinates and played a mediating role in bureaucratic conflicts. He tolerated and even encouraged different, sometimes conflicting, versions of Soviet policy toward Germany. As a result, Soviet bureaucratic politics complicated SMAG's activities. Soviet officials in Germany were subordinate to various structures in Moscow, including the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; at the same time, some of them enjoyed direct contacts with Stalin and his lieutenants, as well as with the heads of various departments in the party's Central Committee. SMAG officials had different domains, according to their functions and tasks, with intersecting, but sometimes conflicting, responsibilities. Their working relations with different groups of Germans and their patronage ties to different bosses in Moscow, as well as the intensified political infighting in Stalin's entourage, added to the picture of confusion.<sup>28</sup>

The evidence does not point to Semenov having an exclusive role in Soviet policy making in Germany.<sup>29</sup> There were other architects of Soviet policies in the zone. One of them was the head of SMAG's division of political information and propaganda, Colonel Sergei Tyulpanov, a military intellectual with expertise in international economics and propaganda. Tyulpanov seemed to have had powerful patrons in Moscow, including Stalin's influential lieutenants Lev Mekhlis and Alexei Kuznetsov. The latter was one of the Leningraders, the party officials who had worked under Andrei Zhdanov. As a result, until 1948, Tyulpanov worked

independently from Semenov and his SMAG superiors, managing media and censorship, cinema, and political parties and trade unions, as well as science and culture, in the zone. He even survived the repeated sharp criticism from a number of high Soviet officials, who blamed him for the failures of the SED and Communist propaganda in West Germany.<sup>30</sup>

Soviet interests in Germany were so diverse and contradictory that Sokolovsky, Tyulpanov, and other SMAG officials continually had to walk the tightrope. On the one hand, they sought to organize East Germany in the only way they knew, that is, in the Soviet way. On the other hand, they and their patrons in the party leadership understood that abusing civilians, as well as dismantling industrial assets in the Soviet zone, would only complicate the struggle for Germany.<sup>31</sup> In partial compensation for the dismantling, East Germans got more food to eat. At the height of the severe postwar famine in the USSR, Stalin did not extract agricultural reparations from Germans, although it would have saved many Russians and Ukrainians from starvation.<sup>32</sup> In October 1945, Stalin decided to curb industrial looting in the Eastern Zone. In November, he told visiting Polish Communists that the Soviets were planning to leave some industries in Germany and would only extract their final production. The Soviets organized 31 stock companies (SAGs) that operated on the basis of 119 German plants and factories originally scheduled for removal. "By the end of 1946," writes Norman Naimark, "the Soviets owned close to 30 percent of all production in eastern Germany." A stock company of highest strategic value was the Wismut uranium project in Lower Saxony that produced the fuel for the first Soviet atomic bombs.<sup>33</sup>

The contradictions among different priorities, the dismantling, the construction of a new Germany in the zone, and the struggle for the whole of Germany, remained unresolved. The transfer of industrial assets to the Soviet Union continued, dictated by the needs of Soviet industries as well as by the gigantic armament projects. The Western counterparts declined all requests for resources and equipment from Western zones, which led to more dismantling in the Soviet zone.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, the intensification of the Cold War and the consolidation of the Western zones under U.S. and British guidance allowed Stalin, SMAG, and the East German Communists to move ahead with the task of transformation and consolidation of East Germany. This task became the priority for the Soviets.

#### INTEGRATING EAST GERMANY INTO THE SOVIET BLOC

Unilateral measures to transform the Soviet zone of Germany began from the first day of Soviet occupation. Beginning in 1945, the Soviets and the German Communists carried out radical land reform, compartmentalization of large es-

ites, and distribution of wealth among the small and middle farmers. Semenov recalled that Stalin devoted much attention to the planning and execution of land reforms. The Bolsheviks believed they retained power and prevailed in the civil war largely because they sanctioned confiscation of landlords' land and property of peasants. The same could help German Communists. German *Bauern*, the peasant farmers, did not mind getting the land from the *Junkers*, the landowners' class, as long as it was done legally. Land reforms in East Germany as well as elsewhere in Central Europe were a definite political success for the Soviets and their Communist appointees.<sup>35</sup>

At his meeting with Ulbricht and Pieck in February 1946, Stalin approved the concept of "a special German road to socialism." He hoped that the establishment of the SED would "create a good precedent for Western zones."<sup>36</sup> Yet the "Socialist Unity Party" remained, in the eyes of many Germans, especially women, linked to the Soviet dismantling, violence, and rape that had taken place in the zone. The party suffered a humiliating defeat in the first postwar municipal elections in the zone, particularly in Greater Berlin, in October 1946, when 49 percent voted for the parties of the center and the right. From that moment on, the Soviets simply left nothing to chance, and specialists of SMAG helped the SED to falsify future election results. The new party became the essential vehicle for establishing a political regime following the Soviet model in the Eastern Zone. When Stalin met with the SED delegation at the end of January 1947, he instructed the East German Communists to create secret police and paramilitary forces in the zone "without clamor." In June 1946, the Soviets created a coordinating body for security organs called the German Directorate for the Interior.<sup>37</sup>

One more card that Stalin intended to play in Germany was that of German nationalism. Several decades of experience had taught Stalin that nationalism could be a more potent force than revolutionary romanticism and Communist internationalism. Molotov recalled: "He saw how Hitler managed to organize German people. Hitler led his people, and we felt it by the way Germans fought during the war."<sup>38</sup> In January 1947, Stalin asked the SED delegates: "Are there many Nazi elements in Germany? What kind of force do they represent? In particular in the Western zones?" The SED leaders admitted their ignorance on his subject. Then Stalin advised them to supplant the policy of elimination of Nazi collaborators "by a different one—aimed to attract them, in order to avoid pushing all former Nazis to the enemy camp." The former Nazi activists should be allowed, he continued, to organize their own party that would "operate in the same bloc with the SED." Wilhelm Pieck expressed doubts as to whether SMAG would permit the formation of such a party. Stalin laughed and said he would facilitate it as much as he could.<sup>39</sup>

Semenov took the minutes of the meeting, and he recalled Stalin saying: "There were overall ten million members in the Nazi Party, and they all had families, friends and acquaintances. This is a big number. For how long should we ignore their concerns?" The Kremlin leader suggested a title for their new party: National Democratic Party of Germany. He asked Semenov if SMAG could find in some prison a former regional Nazi leader and put him at the helm of this party. When Semenov said that perhaps all of them had been executed, Stalin expressed regrets. He then suggested that the former Nazis should be allowed to have their own newspaper, "perhaps even with the title *Völkische Beobachter*," the notorious official daily of the Third Reich.<sup>40</sup>

These new tactics from Stalin's arsenal conflicted notably with his earlier manipulation of the "German threat" in the Slavic countries of Central Europe, but also with the core beliefs of Communist elites and with anti-German feelings of Russians. The proposal to cooperate with ex-Nazis dismayed both German Communists and SMAG officials, who waited a year to implement it. Only in May 1948, after the appropriate propagandist preparation, did SMAG disband the commissions on de-Nazification. In June, the first congress of the National Democratic Party of Germany (NDPD) opened in Berlin, with Semenov attending it in secret, his face covered with a newspaper. This was, Semenov recalls, "just the first link in the chain of important actions" in creating the new pro-Soviet and anti-Western balance in German politics. The complete rehabilitation of the former Nazis, as well as the officers of the Wehrmacht, coincided with the formation of the GDR in 1949.<sup>41</sup>

Stalin must have expected that the idea of a centralized, reunified, and neutral Germany would be so irresistible for German nationalists that they would overcome their enmity toward the Soviets and the Communists. And he certainly wanted to turn German nationalism against the West, at the same time as Byrnes and the Americans began to exploit German national sentiments against the USSR. On Stalin's instructions, Soviet diplomacy and propaganda relentlessly pushed the idea of a centralized German state and contrasted the Soviet stand with Western proposals of federalization and decentralization. The Western powers "really want to have four Germanys but they hide it in every way," said Stalin in January 1947, and reaffirmed the Soviet line: "A central government must be created, and it can sign the peace treaty." As a Russian scholar observes, Stalin was reluctant "to shoulder the responsibility for Germany's division. He wanted that role to be played by the Western powers." Therefore, he deliberately "stayed one step behind the Western powers' actions."<sup>42</sup> Indeed, every Soviet step toward creating units of military and secret police inside the zone was taken after the Western powers took their own decisive steps toward the

eparation of West Germany: Bizonia, the Marshall Plan, and the formation of West Germany.

Until 1947, Stalin played a crucial role in restraining East German Communists and some SMAG enthusiasts who wanted a rapid “construction of socialism” in the zone. He may have been waiting for drastic changes in Europe’s economic and political environment that could have come with economic crisis, U.S. elections, or other developments. Meanwhile, the German Question began to generate fuel for a great power confrontation. The Truman administration continued to shift from the policy of withdrawal from Germany to the policy of long-term economic reconstruction of Western zones. After the failure of the second conference of foreign ministers in Moscow (March–April 1947) to reach an agreement on Germany, the U.S. secretary of state, George Marshall, came to the conclusion that “the patient was dying while doctors deliberate,” and the Truman administration launched the Marshall Plan to jump-start European economic recovery.<sup>43</sup>

At first the Kremlin had no clue what motivated the new U.S. initiative. Perhaps, Soviet economists suggested, the United States anticipated a major economic crisis and wanted to give away another “Lend-Lease” to create new markets for their goods. There was a revived hope among Soviet economic managers that this time the USSR might obtain American loans that had not materialized in 1945–46. At first, the Soviets did not link the Marshall Plan to the German Question: Molotov was only instructed to block attempts to reduce German reparations in exchange for American loans. After consultations with the Yugoslav Communist leaders, Stalin and Molotov decided that the delegations of other Central European countries should go to Paris, where a conference on economic assistance to Europe was to take place. The Czechoslovak, Polish, and Rumanian governments announced that they would participate in the conference, when Stalin changed his mind.<sup>44</sup>

On June 29, 1948, Molotov reported to Stalin from Paris, where he had consulted with the British and French leaders: The Americans “are eager to use this opportunity to break into the internal economies of European countries and especially to redirect the flow of European trade in their own interest.” By early July, the new intelligence from Paris and London, especially the secret U.S.-British talks behind the backs of the Soviets, revealed to the Kremlin that the Truman administration had in mind a far-reaching plan of economic and political integration of Europe: the Marshall Plan aimed at containing Soviet influence and reviving the European, and above all the German, economy, according to American blueprints. On July 7, 1947, Molotov sent a new directive to the Central European governments, “advising” them to cancel their participation in the Paris

conference, because “under the guise of the plan of European recovery,” the organizers of the Marshall Plan “in reality want to create a Western bloc that would include Western Germany.”<sup>45</sup> When the Czechoslovak government refused to comply, citing their economic dependence on Western markets and loans, Stalin summoned them to Moscow and presented them with an ultimatum: even their attending the Paris conference would be regarded by the Soviets as a hostile act. The browbeaten Czechoslovak delegation had to pledge obedience. In return, Stalin promised he would order the Soviet industrial ministries to purchase Czechoslovak goods and pledged to provide immediate assistance in the amount of 200,000 tons of wheat, barley, and oats.<sup>46</sup>

The Soviet flip-flop on the Marshall Plan demonstrated a pattern in Stalin’s reaction to the growing American involvement in Europe: from suspicion and temporizing to a fierce counterattack. Stalin’s reading of the Marshall Plan left no room for German neutrality. A report from the Soviet ambassador in Washington, reflecting the new thinking in the Kremlin, depicted the U.S. plans as building a bloc encircling the USSR, “passing in the West across West Germany” and beyond. Reports from London and other Western capitals repeated the same story.<sup>47</sup> Stalin’s instructions to foreign Communists pushed them to shift from parliamentary activities to political violence and preparations for war. In the fall of 1947, the Kremlin sought to destabilize Western Europe through strikes and demonstrations organized by French and Italian Communist parties and trade unions. The chewing out of the Czechs indicated that Stalin finally realized that his wait-and-see scenario for Germany and Central Europe had to be discarded. Communist parties in Central Europe were told to march to the Kremlin’s drum and join the Information Bureau of the Communist Parties (Cominform), headquartered in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Still, Stalin’s instructions to the Central European Communists were to combine resolution with prudence. He hoped to present the acceleration of “Sovietization” as a gradual and natural process with Moscow’s hand as hidden as possible.<sup>48</sup>

Stalin had been considering strengthening his control over European Communist parties since 1946, but the establishment of the Cominform was accelerated by the Marshall Plan. It reflected Stalin’s conviction that, from now on, the Soviets could manage Central Europe only with iron ideological and party discipline. The Communist parties had to renounce “national roads to socialism;” they quickly became Stalinized and rigidly subordinate to Kremlin policies. The imposition of Stalinist controls led to the “purge” of Tito’s Yugoslavia. This event bore a strong imprint of Stalin’s personality. Stalin’s outburst of hatred toward Tito and the Yugoslav Communist leadership was a surprise, even to his subordinates. It was, however, typical of Stalin’s behavior in Soviet politics during his consolidation of

power, when he alternated between affection and hatred toward his political friends and supporters. Stalin's treatment of Central European Communist leaders was not markedly different from the way he treated his closest lieutenants, Molotov and Zhdanov—it was a mixture of deceiving charm, unprovoked sadism, suspicion, and contempt. In the case of the Yugoslavs, Stalin's treatment backfired and produced a rebellion of the most valued Soviet partner in Central Europe.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the consolidation of Central Europe à la Stalin produced an internal, as well as an external, enemy. The ferocious campaign against "Titoism" performed the same function in 1948–49 as the bogus campaign against "Trotskyism" had done in 1935–38. It helped to consolidate Stalin's absolute control and preclude even remote possibilities of opposition and resistance to his will. At the same time, Stalin was obsessed with the idea of assassinating Tito, just as he had been with Trotsky's assassination.<sup>50</sup>

The rapid consolidation of the Soviet bloc in Central Europe brought about great changes in Soviet policies in Germany. They shifted decisively toward the creation of a Sovietized East Germany at the expense of the campaign for German unity. Stalin did not allow the SED to become a member of the Cominform. Yet, the SED leaders, including former Social Democrats, expressed unequivocal loyalty to the Soviet Union and denounced the Marshall Plan. In the fall of 1947, Stalin pushed the East German Communist leadership to organize military formations under the auspices of the German Directorate of the Interior, the police apparatus in the Soviet zone. In November 1947, a Department of Intelligence and Information was set up inside the Directorate of the Interior, with the goal of detecting and uprooting by extralegal methods any opposition to the East German regime. In July 1948, as the Berlin crisis deepened, the Soviet leader sanctioned a plan to equip and train 10,000 East German soldiers, as an "alert police" living in barracks.<sup>51</sup> All these measures were formulated and implemented in deep secrecy. Stalin fully understood that they constituted a flagrant violation of Yalta and Potsdam decisions, and this policy stood in stark contrast to Soviet propaganda and diplomacy that promoted the option of a reunified, neutral, and demilitarized Germany.

In September 1948, the SED denounced a special German road to socialism, the concept it had adhered to since its creation in 1946, as "rotten and dangerous," a path to nationalist "deviations." In the atmosphere of anti-Yugoslav hysteria, East German Communists preferred to be on the safe side, trying to join the ranks of loyal Stalinists even without an invitation from the Kremlin to do so.<sup>52</sup>

From December 1947 to February 1948, Western leaders, after separate meet-

ings in London without the Soviet Union, began to organize a West German federal state. This state would receive American assistance through the Marshall Plan, and the Ruhr production plans would be revised to ensure a quick economic revival of Western zones. Stalin might still hope that a capitalist economic crisis would occur to ruin Western plans, but he could no longer postpone his reaction to the emergence of West Germany. His response was to act at the point of maximum Soviet superiority over the West, in Berlin. In March 1948, answering complaints of SED officials about the Western presence in Berlin, Stalin remarked: "Maybe we shall succeed in kicking them out."<sup>53</sup> He decided to blockade West Berlin in an attempt to remove the Allies from the city or, even better, to force them to renegotiate their London agreements.

In addition to the London agreements, the introduction of the new currency in West Germany and West Berlin became a trigger for Soviet action. Introduction of a new currency would sharply increase the costs of the Soviet occupation of Germany (15 billion rubles in 1947). Until then, SMAG could print the old occupational marks that remained in circulation in Western zones. Financial separation of the Soviet zone from West Germany threatened to end this bonanza.<sup>54</sup>

By making West Berlin a hostage to Western separatist plans, Stalin hoped he had a reasonable chance of success in killing two birds with one stone. If the Western powers chose to negotiate, this would complicate their plans to create a West German state. These talks would also give SMAG more time to carry out their own preparations in the zone. If Western authorities refused to bargain, they risked losing their base in Berlin. The Soviet leader felt confident in his ability to adjust his use of force around West Berlin to avoid provoking war and to make the Western powers look responsible for the crisis. Significantly, he ordered a delay in printing new banknotes for the Soviet zone until the Western powers introduced their D-mark in Berlin.<sup>55</sup>

The Berlin blockade was another of Stalin's probes, in which caution joined with a brutal determination to push whenever the balance of forces was right. Other European developments provide a revealing context for the Soviet move against West Berlin. In February 1948, the Kremlin succeeded with this tactic, when the Communists seized power in Czechoslovakia and the liberal-democratic government surrendered without a fight. At the same time, Stalin came to the conclusion that the United States and Great Britain would never let Communist forces win in Greece. At the meeting with Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders on February 10, Stalin said that "if there are no conditions for victory" in Greece, "one must not be afraid to admit it." He suggested that the "guerrilla movement," supported in 1947 by the Kremlin and the Yugoslavs, should be "terminated." It

is Yugoslavia's disagreement with Stalin's calculation that precipitated, along with other factors, the Stalin-Tito split.<sup>56</sup>

While the Berlin crisis was brewing, the imminent victory of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in April 1948 threatened the balance of power in Europe. Historian Victor Zaslavsky has found ample evidence that the militants of PCI were prepared, if necessary, to seize power by means of military insurrection. The PCI leader, Palmiro Togliatti, schooled in Stalinist "realism," however, had grave doubts about the outcome of such an adventure. On March 23, Togliatti used secret channels to send a letter to Stalin, asking for advice. He warned the Kremlin leader that PCI's military confrontation with the opposing political camp could "lead to a big war." Togliatti informed Stalin that, in the case of a civil war in Italy, the United States, Great Britain, and France would support the anti-Communist side; then PCI would need the assistance of the Yugoslav army and the forces of other Eastern European countries in order to maintain its control over northern Italy. Togliatti's letter evoked an immediate response from Stalin. He instructed PCI not to use "armed insurrection for any reasons" to seize power in Italy.<sup>57</sup> Stalin, true to his cautious calculation of the balance of forces, decided that Italy, located within the British-American sphere of influence, was a long shot. West Berlin, however, was inside the Soviet zone of occupation, and the German issue was crucial enough to justify a calculated risk.

In May 1948, as historian Vladimir Pechatnov discovered, Stalin planned a previous "peace offensive" against the Truman administration. His goal was to undermine U.S. policies in Europe, presenting them as the only cause of the emerging division of Europe and Germany. He used the secret channel to Henry Wallace (who ran for president against Truman) to convey to him, and via him to the American public, that the Soviets "are not waging any Cold War. The United States is waging it." Stalin wanted to create an impression that it would be possible to overcome the U.S.-Soviet contradictions through negotiations. The Soviet leader continued to hint at this illusory prospect in an "open letter" addressed to Wallace and supporting his peace proposals.<sup>58</sup>

Unexpectedly, the Soviet blockade of West Berlin became a propaganda fiasco and a strategic failure. The mild winter, Anglo-American ingenuity in organizing the airlift, and the stoicism of the people of West Berlin defeated Soviet purposes. The West taught Stalin a costly lesson by mounting harsh economic sanctions against the Soviet zone and making the Soviets pay for the damage. Finally, the Western currency reform in West Germany and West Berlin was a great success, thanks in great part to the Soviet boycott.<sup>59</sup> The psychological and political effects of the Berlin blockade were fatal to Soviet influence in West Berlin and West Germany. It helped to forge a new friendship and anti-Communist alliance be-

tween the West Germans and the Allies, particularly the Americans. The American and British presence in West Germany and West Berlin gained a popular legitimacy that it had lacked before. The Berlin crisis facilitated the formation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) by the United States, Canada, and ten West European nations, announced on April 9, 1949. NATO permanently and formally legitimized the U.S. military presence in Western Europe and West Germany. On May 11, 1949, after brief talks, the Soviet Union lifted the blockade and signed an agreement with the three Western powers. This agreement recognized de facto permanent Western political rights in Berlin and agreed, in a separate protocol, to the division of the city into West and East. On May 23, 1949, just days after the blockade was lifted, the Western zones became the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

Several of Stalin's basic assumptions about Germany, based on the interwar experience, turned out to be false. First, the tactics of an alliance with pan-German nationalists did not produce its expected benefits. Stalin failed to realize that the collapse of the Nazi regime in the spring of 1945 left most Germans wary of any form of nationalism. As political developments in West Germany after 1948 demonstrated, the most potent factors there were not nationalism, but a desire for economic normalization, traditional regionalism, and alienation from East German lands, going back to the reaction against Prussia's domination in the First Reich. These factors were seen in the support Konrad Adenauer received in the upper and middle classes of the Rhineland, the support that allowed him to become the first chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.<sup>60</sup>

Instead of nationalist tensions in West Germany, there was an unexpected symbiosis between U.S. troops in West Germany and German civilians, especially women. Many German women liked American GIs, who became providers of scarce food and basic goods. While, in popular opinion, the Soviets were "takers," looters, and dismantlers, the Americans were "givers." During the Berlin blockade, German opinion shifted even more drastically in favor of the United States and against the Soviets.<sup>61</sup>

Secondly, the 1940s did not end in a crisis for world capitalism. Stalin banked a great deal on this assumption. He envisioned intense rivalries among Western European countries and the United States, reflecting the Leninist view of the inherent contradictions of the market-based economy.<sup>62</sup> In reality, the postwar economic recession that began in 1948 was not nearly as serious as expected. Soviet dreams that a new Great Slump would make the United States isolationist and more conciliatory toward Moscow's wishes did not come true.

Once again, Stalin refused to admit his miscalculation. In March 1948, he told SED officials that the unification of Germany would be "a protracted process"

and would take "several years." This delay, he continued, would benefit the SED, because the Communists would be able to intensify their propaganda work and 'prepare the masses for Germany's reunification." Once the people's minds "are prepared," then "the Americans will have to capitulate."<sup>63</sup> In December 1948, at another meeting with the East German Communists, Stalin exuded a fake optimism. The SED leaders admitted that they and their allies had ruined their political reputation in West Germany; everybody regarded them as "Soviet agents." In reply, the Kremlin master disingenuously reproached Ulbricht and his comrades for renouncing a special German road to socialism: why did they try to fight 'naked" like the ancient Germans who had fought against the Roman legions? "One must use a disguise," he said. Stalin suggested that "several good communists" in West Germany should leave the party and infiltrate the SPD, in order to subvert Social Democrats from within, just as the Polish and Hungarian Communists had done to their opposition parties.<sup>64</sup>

The SED leaders took advantage of the Soviet fiasco and the proclamation of the West German state to request more autonomy from Soviet occupation authorities. Under the pressure of events, Stalin allowed the SED to prepare for the establishment of a formal state, the German Democratic Republic. The GDR was officially born on October 7, 1949. In 1949, Stalin set up the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (the COMECON or CMEA), the Soviet response to the Marshall Plan and the Western economic bloc. Its primary task was to develop "basic types of production that would allow us [the Soviet bloc] to get rid of essential equipment and raw materials imported from capitalist countries." Soon the GDR was allowed to join it.<sup>65</sup>

Some evidence indicates that the Kremlin master felt humiliated by his retreat in Germany. As the Berlin blockade was nearing its ignoble finale, Stalin resumed his attacks on Molotov and arrested his wife. Molotov's near-fall, as historians Gorlizky and Khlevniuk believe, "was in part the price Molotov paid for the failure of Soviet policy in Germany." In March 1949, Molotov lost his post as foreign minister. A year later, Stalin still fumed at "the dishonest, perfidious, and arrogant behavior of the United States in Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, and especially its decision to form NATO." His way of getting back at the arrogant Americans was to support Kim Il Sung's plan to annex South Korea.<sup>66</sup>

### THE KOREAN WAR AND EAST GERMANY

The outbreak of war in Korea in June 1950 radically militarized the Cold War and reduced the room for peace talks and settlements in Europe virtually to nothing. According to Molotov, the war was "pressed on us by the Koreans themselves.

Stalin said it was impossible to avoid the national question of a united Korea."<sup>67</sup> Still, the decision to go to war was Stalin's; once made, it killed any possibility for the peaceful reunification of Germany.

The new alliance between Stalin and Mao Ze-dong paved the road for the Korean War and was a major factor in shifting Stalin's strategies from Europe and Germany to the Far East. Until 1949, the Kremlin provided minimal assistance to Asian Communists and revolutionaries, including Mao Ze-dong in China and Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam.<sup>68</sup> The victory of the Chinese Communists forced Stalin to reconsider his priorities. The triumph of the CCP in the most-populous country of the world contrasted with the stalemate in Germany and the failures of Communists in France and Italy. In July 1949, at the meeting with the CCP delegation in the Kremlin, Stalin admitted his past mistakes in doubting the victory of the Communists in China. Still, in December 1949 he was reluctant to do the same, when Mao Ze-dong came to Moscow to participate in the celebration of the Soviet leader's birthday. Only when Mao refused to leave the USSR without a definitive Sino-Soviet arrangement did Stalin agree to the new Sino-Soviet alliance and a new set of agreements. Mikoyan and Molotov helped to change the leader's mind. During the Stalin-Mao talks that followed, the Kremlin master vowed to close the curtain on the "Yalta system," the Realpolitik arrangements among the great powers that had given the USSR international legitimacy and diplomatic advantages in Europe and Asia. "To hell with Yalta!" the Kremlin leader told Mao, agreeing that the Chinese should take the lead in promoting the revolutionary process in Asia.<sup>69</sup> Tough bargaining and mutual acrimony, however, characterized the negotiations to the end. Unexpectedly, the Chinese requested that all Soviet possessions in Manchuria, including the railroad and the Port Arthur base, would be returned to China. This angered Stalin, but eventually he decided that the alliance with China was more important than Soviet interests in Manchuria. The new Sino-Soviet Treaty, signed on February 14, 1950, became the greatest success of Soviet foreign policy for many years. At the same time, it laid the ground for a future Sino-Soviet rivalry, as Mao felt humiliated by Stalin's condescension and refusal to treat China as an equal partner.<sup>70</sup>

For the first time since the 1920s, Stalin had to treat foreign Communists not simply as the tools for Soviet foreign policy goals but as independent forces or even partners. This led to the substantial, if not altogether genuine, reappearance of the revolutionary "romantic" element in Stalinist international discourse and policies. In Indochina, the Chinese and the Soviets agreed to provide aid to the Viet Minh army. In Korea, Stalin abandoned his previous restraint in regard to the Korean Communists, who begged for Soviet assistance to liberate the Korean peninsula from the pro-American regime of Syngman Rhee. In January 1950,



Stalin authorized the North Korean leader, Kim Il Sung, to prepare for a war of national reunification and pledged full military assistance. Historian Evgeny Ajanov accurately summarized new evidence on this decision. Stalin changed his mind on a Korean war because of (1) the victory of the Communists in China; (2) the Soviet acquisition of the atom bomb (first tested in August 1949); (3) the establishment of NATO and general worsening of Soviet relations with the West; and (4) a perceived weakening of Washington's positions and of its will to get involved militarily in Asia. At the same time, when Kim Il Sung and another North Korean leader, Pak Hong-young, visited Moscow between March 30 and April 25 to plan a war, Stalin told them that the USSR would not intervene directly, especially if the Americans sent troops to save South Korea.<sup>71</sup>

The outbreak of the Korean War led to a new war scare in Western Europe; many expected Soviet tanks to dash into West Germany at any time. U.S. policymakers, however, assumed that a war in Europe was improbable. They concluded that the USSR would continue to probe for Western weaknesses in Europe, as well as in Asia. To discourage these probes, the Americans quadrupled their military budget, feverishly built up the stockpiles of atomic bombs, and pushed a reluctant France and other NATO members to sanction the creation of West German armed forces.<sup>72</sup> Soviet observers and intelligence had no trouble monitoring the changing geopolitical landscape in Western Europe: namely, the integration of French and German coal and steel industries, the preparations for the recognition of the Federal Republic of Germany's sovereignty, and the plans to set up a "European army" with West German divisions as its core.<sup>73</sup> American assessments of Soviet intentions were generally correct. Cautious probes remained Stalin's signature policies, despite his verbal emulation of Mao's revolutionary romanticism.

U.S. intervention prevented North Korean plans for a quick "revolutionary" victory. Still, as Soviet archival evidence shows, Stalin had learned from the past and was prepared for a nasty surprise. On August 27, 1950, in a cable to the Czechoslovak Communist president, Klement Gottwald, the Soviet leader explained his view on the war in Asia. The Soviet Union, he argued, deliberately abstained from the crucial vote at the United Nations that proclaimed North Korea an aggressor state. This was a calculated move to get the Americans "entangled in the military intervention in Korea" in which the United States would "squander its military prestige and moral authority." If North Korea began to lose the war, then China would come to North Korea's assistance. And "America, as any other state, cannot cope with China having at its disposal large armed forces." A long and protracted war between China and the United States would be, in Stalin's opinion, a good thing. It would give the Soviet Union more time to

grow in strength. Also, it would "distract the United States from Europe to the Far East." And "the third world war will be postponed for the indefinite term, and this would give the time necessary to consolidate socialism in Europe."<sup>74</sup>

Over the next two years, the Soviet leader enacted this scenario. He successfully persuaded Mao and the Chinese Communists to fight against the United States in Korea. He told them that the United States would not dare to escalate the war. He even boasted that the USSR was not afraid of confronting the Americans, because "together we will be stronger than the USA and England, while the other European capitalist states (with the exception of Germany which is unable to provide any assistance to the United States now) do not present a serious military threat."<sup>75</sup>

In reality, the cautious schemer was determined to avoid a premature clash with the United States in Asia and Europe. Stalin was very impressed by U.S. airpower, as were hundreds of Soviet military pilots who fought against the Americans in the skies over Korea. The Soviet aircraft industry and the development of radar and air defenses received an enormous boost in 1951–53 but continued to lag behind the United States.<sup>76</sup> The Soviet atomic arsenal consisted only of a very few bombs, and there was no means to deliver them to the United States. As Marshal Sergei Akhromeyev told diplomat Anatoly Dobrynin twenty-three years later, Stalin still had to rely on a Soviet non-nuclear response to an American nuclear attack. In practice, it meant that the Soviet military had to maintain an armored force in East Germany capable of delivering a lightning blow to NATO armies and occupying Western Europe all the way to the English Channel. According to Akhromeyev, Stalin believed that an armored threat would counter the American nuclear threat. In addition to this, Stalin directed all Central European satellites in January 1951 "to create a modern and powerful military force" within two to three years.<sup>77</sup> This auxiliary force would add to the credibility of the Soviet land superiority.

These Soviet military plans turned Germany into the major theater of a possible future war and enormously increased the strategic importance of the GDR. Along with the collapse of the Yalta international order and the revolutionary radicalism of Stalin and Mao in the Far East, this development heralded the need for change in Soviet policies for Germany. At first the GDR was left out of this crash campaign of military mobilization and production. Stalin still wanted to use the possibility of peaceful German reunification for various political goals: to aggravate discord in the NATO, delay and derail the process of West German rearmament, and cover up the military preparations in the East. Soviet propagandists exploited to the utmost the fact that several Nazi-era generals were involved in the efforts to create a West German army. In September 1951, Stalin and the

Politburo instructed the SED leadership to confront the Western powers with the proposal of “all-German elections aiming to create a unified, democratic, peaceful Germany.”<sup>78</sup> It was a propaganda probe. The Kremlin never intended to hold free elections, since the Communists would have certainly lost them.

The East German leadership implemented this campaign with its habitual double-handedness. As both Norman Naimark and Hope Harrison argue, the GDR leaders were not mere pawns and transmitters of Moscow’s will. Their unspoken goal was to build up the GDR as a “socialist” country, that is, to carry out the same purges and transformations that had been proceeding in other countries of Central Europe. The role of the provisional government, pending the negotiations with the West, had no appeal for them. And the plans of the European Defense Community (EDC) that involved West German armed forces gave Ulbricht and his colleagues new arguments to demand the full integration of the GDR into the Communist political-military bloc. In particular, in early 1952, they sought to exploit the forthcoming signing of the agreement by Western powers enhancing West Germany’s sovereignty (“General Treaty”) and the agreement on EDC as the moment for Moscow to act.<sup>79</sup>

The Soviet occupational authorities in East Germany (in October 1949, SMAG was renamed the Soviet Control Commission [SCC]), General Vasily Chuikov and Vladimir Semenov, believed it was vital to respond to Western developments by building up the GDR’s legitimacy and by making its leadership appear to be independent of the USSR. Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky, who replaced Molotov, however, did not want any drastic actions. He even expressed doubts about the authenticity of a copy of the “General Treaty” obtained by the East Germans. The ministry’s memoranda to the Politburo continued to treat the GDR as a part of the “defeated state” and objected to recognizing it as an actor rather than the subject of the peace settlement in Germany. The last point indicated, remarkably, that even during the Korean War there were people in the Soviet leadership who continued to regard the Yalta international framework as validating the Soviet presence in Germany. There was no great desire in Moscow’s diplomatic and military communities to recognize the sovereignty of the GDR.<sup>80</sup>

Stalin continued to deny, perhaps even to himself, that the Soviet Union had lost the strategic initiative on the German Question. Prodded by the SCC reports, he decided to stage one more dramatic act in his campaign for German reunification. On March 10, 1952, he sent a note to the three Western powers proposing new peace treaty terms. The future Germany would be created through free elections and become neutral, but with its own armed forces. Unfortunately, there are no sources into Stalin’s thinking at that time. His previous policies, however, leave little doubt that this was an attempt to give a second life to the

sputtering Soviet propaganda of German unity, undermine the Western alliance, and sow discord among West Germans. The detailed analysis of Soviet plans for Austria, which had long become a hostage of the German Question and Soviet military plans, also shows that Kremlin diplomacy at that time was just a camouflage for war preparations. But the new initiative failed to derail the plans for the European army. Western governments and the Federal Republic of Germany quickly rejected this note as a propaganda move.<sup>81</sup>

Days after that rejection, on April 7, 1952, Stalin revealed his real plans to the East German Communist leaders. The GDR, he responded, could now join the other “peoples’ democracies” in making preparations for war. East German youth, subjected to antiwar propaganda, had now to be taught to get ready “to defend” their country against the West. “As soon as you’ve got any kind of army,” he said to the East Germans, Western powers “will talk differently with you. You will get recognition and affection, since everybody likes force.” Stalin proposed creating a comprehensive East German army: thirty divisions of infantry and marines, an air force, and a submarine fleet, with hundreds of tanks and thousands of artillery pieces. This army would be deployed along Western frontiers. Behind these forces, Stalin planned to deploy the Soviet army.<sup>82</sup>

During his second meeting with the leaders of the GDR, Stalin did more than reverse his previous policy. He revealed what he had never stopped thinking about since the beginning of the occupation. “The Americans,” he said, “need their army in Western Germany to hold Western Europe in their hands. They say that they have their army in defense against us. But the real goal of this army is to control Europe.” Stalin sounded gloomy and resigned. “The Americans will draw Western Germany into the Atlantic Pact. They will create West German troops. Adenauer is in the Americans’ pocket. All ex-fascists and generals also are there.” Finally, the Kremlin *vozhd* admitted stalemate in Germany. He told the East German Communists what they wanted to hear: “You must organize your own state. The line of demarcation between the Western and Eastern Germany should be regarded as a border, and not as a simple but as a dangerous border.” In other words, Stalin began to treat the GDR not as a provisional arrangement but as a permanent strategic asset. Still, Stalin did not take the last step, closing the sector border with West Berlin. Burnt by his Berlin blockade fiasco, he only “recommended” that the movement of people across this border should be restricted. Western agents, he said, move too freely around the German Democratic Republic. They may go to extremes and assassinate Ulbricht and the SCC head, General Vasily Chuikov.<sup>83</sup>

Stalin’s increasing age reduced his capacity to work, but his agile mind could still function with ferocious energy. For years he had planned to turn East

Germany into the frontline of a future war with the West. At the same time, true to his vision of German nationalism, he still pushed for appealing to the Social Democrats and nationalist segments of the West German population, in an attempt to undercut the support for the American military presence in the Federal Republic. "The propaganda campaign for German unity should continue at all times. You are now holding this weapon and should never lose your grip on it. We will also continue submitting proposals on the aspects of German unity in order to expose the Americans."<sup>84</sup>

Stalin's decisions of April 1952, historian Ruud van Dijk concludes, "resolved the basic contradiction of his German policy" between the realities in the zone and the proclaimed policies on Germany.<sup>85</sup> Simultaneously, they created other problems. In the following months, Ulbricht per agreement with Stalin shifted from a moderate method of Sovietization of the GDR to full-scale proclamation of "the dictatorship of the proletariat" and the crash course on the construction of socialism. On July 9, 1952, the Kremlin passed the Politburo decision that formally sanctioned the course for the "construction of socialism" in the GDR. Later, Molotov claimed that Ulbricht mistakenly interpreted this as the authorization for an *accelerated* course of the construction of socialism. Stalin, however, never objected to Ulbricht's actions. In any case, the SED leader felt he acted with Moscow's authorization, and he acted with zeal. All-out militarization of the GDR involved confiscations and arrests of saboteurs and denunciations of Western "warmongers" and "internal enemies." The regime crushed the private sector in commerce and production and embarked on a collectivization campaign in the countryside.

Even a much healthier economy, one not devastated by the war and Soviet looting, could not have fulfilled the astronomical production plans coming from Moscow. The results of the Stalin-Ulbricht new policy were disastrous: skyrocketing inflation, an agricultural crisis, and grossly distorted economic development. Making matters worse, Stalin did nothing to reduce the burden of East German reparations and other payments. By 1953, the GDR had paid more than 4 billion U.S. dollars in reparations but still owed the Soviet Union and Poland 2.7 billion dollars, or annual budget expenses of more than 211 million dollars. Also, the GDR continued to pay about 229 million dollars annually to cover Soviet occupational expenses in the GDR. Finally, Stalin, with the same unsentimental economy he displayed in dealing with the Chinese and Korean Communists (who paid in U.S. dollars for Soviet war matériel they used to combat the Americans in Korea), sold to the East German Communist state sixty-six plants and factories that the Soviets had earlier confiscated. The Soviets valued them in the amount of 180 million dollars, to be paid by cash or shipments of goods.<sup>86</sup>

In fact, the people of the GDR were much better off than the Soviet people. Inside the USSR, the costs of war preparations caused living standards to stagnate at an abysmally low level.<sup>87</sup> But East German citizens did not know how "lucky" they were in comparison to their Soviet comrades. They compared their standards with the lives of their West German counterparts. Before the crash militarization course, living standards in East Germany had been similar to those in West Germany. After the "economic miracle" took off in the Federal Republic in 1950 and 1951, the living conditions of West Germans began to advance rapidly, leaving the citizens of the GDR far behind. The United States gave generous economic and financial assistance to West Germany through the Marshall Plan and other programs. Most importantly, the U.S. consumer market was available to German goods. A combination of better economic opportunities in the West and the growing oppression and hardship in the East began to impel many young, professionally trained and educated people to leave the GDR. From January 1951 to April 1953, almost half a million people left the GDR for West Berlin and West Germany. Among them were professional workers, farmers, military conscripts, and even many members of the SED and the Union of Free German Youth. Among those who remained, the level of discontent grew. Walter Ulbricht became the object of popular resentment, even hatred.<sup>88</sup>

Stalin's policies in Germany in 1952 made sense for only one contingency—total war mobilization. Stalin's actions at the end of his life, as well as documented activities of his regime, suggest that the dictator believed in the inevitability of war. In the spring of 1952, simultaneous with the shift of German policy, the Kremlin leader ordered the creation of 100 air divisions of 10,000 mid-range jet-propelled bombers. This number was almost double the amount that Soviet Air Force commanders believed was necessary for war needs. There were large-scale military preparations in the Siberian Far East and the Far North, including a study of the capacities for a large-scale invasion of Alaska. One wonders what would have happened had Stalin lived longer and tried to implement these fantastic plans.<sup>89</sup>

Stalin was losing his grip on German affairs. He simply had too many irons in the fire. Aside from military preparations, he was busy with a new round of murderous political intrigues, among them a purge of the secret services, investigations of "the Kremlin doctors' affair," orchestration of a public anti-Semitic campaign, and a plot that led to the purge of the state security bureaucracy and perhaps to elimination of Beria. Stalin also devoted time to his theoretical writings on the "economic problems of socialism" and on linguistics.<sup>90</sup> Meanwhile, the GDR leadership continued its march toward a political and economic crisis.

## AGONY OVER THE GDR

Stalin's death on March 5, 1953, brought the crisis of German policies to the surface. It also made possible a revision of many of Stalin's misguided and bankrupt policies.<sup>91</sup> Stalin's successors in the Politburo (renamed the Presidium in October 1952), in particular Molotov, Malenkov, and Beria, immediately proposed a new peace initiative to reduce the danger of war. Together with the Chinese leadership, they opened armistice talks with the United States on Korea. They also abrogated the policy of pressure on Turkey and allowed Russian women who had married foreigners to leave the Soviet Union. There were other international issues that the troika began to discuss, among them the neutrality option for Austria, the improvement of relations with Iran, and the future of the GDR. Taken together, these changes went far beyond mere propaganda.<sup>92</sup>

The new Soviet "peace initiative" was the result of the insecurity of the Kremlin leaders. Khrushchev recalled: "In the days leading up to Stalin's death we believed that America would invade the Soviet Union and we would go to war."<sup>93</sup> The gigantic U.S. military buildup, including the first thermonuclear test in November 1952, focused the Kremlin's attention on the threat of imminent clash with the United States. Stalin's successors wanted to avoid this clash and gain breathing space to build up Soviet defenses.

Another major impulse for changing the Kremlin's foreign policy came from the GDR, where the new policies produced a social and economic crisis. In March 1953, the SED leadership asked for Soviet permission to close sector borders with the West, in order to stop the flight to the West. Simultaneously, it appealed to Moscow for substantial economic assistance.<sup>94</sup> Later, at the Party Plenum in July, Molotov summarized the reasons for the crisis in East Germany as follows: "They took the crash course of industrialization and had excessively ambitious plan of construction. Besides, they pay the costs of occupation for our army, they pay reparations."<sup>95</sup> Bad signals also continued to come from West Germany. On April 18, the Committee of Information at the Soviet Foreign Ministry reported that the Adenauer government "significantly increased revanchist propaganda and scared the West German population with the threat from the East." Experts signaled to the Presidium that there were no specific policies designed to thwart the ratification of the Bonn and Paris treaties by the Bundestag and the Bundesrat, the two houses of the West German parliament.<sup>96</sup>

The Kremlin leadership waited almost three months to act on Germany. The delay may have stemmed from the fact that the new rulers faced other urgent problems. The war in Korea continued to cause the death of thousands of North Koreans and Chinese and presented a continuing danger for the escalation of

hostilities. Nobody could guarantee that the widespread discontent among the Soviet people would not lead to protests and riots after Stalin's death. According to the new head of the Soviet government, Georgy Malenkov, the main task of the new leadership was "to avoid confusion in the ranks of our party, in the working class, in the country."<sup>97</sup>

Molotov, once again the foreign minister, took the lead in evaluating the German Question. He recalled Vladimir Semenov from the GDR to Moscow to participate in the Foreign Ministry's review of German policies. Semenov, Yakov Malik, Grigory Pushkin, and Mikhail Gribanov drafted one set of proposals after another. Speaking in July 1953, Molotov said that "the facts, we have learned recently, made it absolutely obvious that the political and economic situation in the German Democratic Republic became unfavorable." The Foreign Ministry archives, however, reveal that he and his experts quibbled over peripheral issues.<sup>98</sup> Semenov, the most knowledgeable of the experts, dared to suggest that the Soviets should end the occupation status of the GDR and sign "a treaty on friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance" with Ulbricht.<sup>99</sup> None of the experts dared to mention Ulbricht's policies of the "accelerated construction of socialism" in East Germany.

There is no record of internal discussions, but by all indications Molotov never wavered from his view that German peace talks were a zero-sum game between East and West. He agreed with Semenov, who suggested creating "more favorable conditions for the socialist construction" in the GDR by reducing reparations and other economic obligations to the USSR.<sup>100</sup> On May 5, Molotov proposed to the Presidium that the GDR should stop reparation payments after 1954. At the same time, Molotov was categorically against closing the sector border in Berlin, as the GDR leadership had suggested.<sup>101</sup>

On the surface, Molotov, Malenkov, and Beria, the leading troika in charge of foreign affairs, had few disagreements. In reality, beneath this veneer of unity, rivalry was brewing inside the Kremlin. After Stalin's death, Beria assumed the leadership of the Ministry of the Interior, the result of the merger of the two agencies of secret police and intelligence. He organized a brain trust among lieutenants that helped him to come up with a startling number of initiatives on many issues of domestic and foreign policy. From the start, Beria distanced himself from Stalin's bloody legacy and began exposing his crimes to incredulous members of the Central Committee. Inside the Presidium, he sought support from Malenkov and Khrushchev, hoping to outmaneuver them both. By contrast, he regarded Molotov, the man with the greatest authority among the party elite, as a threat and wanted to undercut his prestige and policies.<sup>102</sup>

The evidence on Beria's views on Germany at that time is vague. In his diary,

written more than ten years later, Semenov concludes that both Beria and Stalin treated the GDR as a tool in the struggle for Germany. Beria only “wanted to accelerate this struggle in the summer of 1953.”<sup>103</sup> Anatoly Sudoplatov, a senior officer of Soviet intelligence, recalls that on the eve of May Day in 1953, Beria ordered him to test the feasibility of unifying Germany. He told Sudoplatov that “the best way to strengthen our world position would be to create a neutral, unified Germany run by a coalition government. Germany would be the balancing factor between American and Soviet interests in Western Europe.” According to this scheme, the GDR would become an autonomous province in the newly unified Germany. “As immediate steps, Beria intended, without informing Molotov’s Foreign Ministry, to use his intelligence contacts for unofficial approaches to prominent politicians in Western Europe.”<sup>104</sup> It is not clear whether Beria also had in mind to establish a back channel with the United States.

On May 6, Beria sent a report to Malenkov, Molotov, Khrushchev, Bulganin, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov concerning the catastrophic flight of refugees from the GDR: 220,000 had left since 1952, including over 3,000 members of the SED and the Union of Free German Youth. In contrast to other reports, this one blamed the exodus on the GDR leadership’s policies. Beria proposed asking the Soviet Control Commission in the GDR to present recommendations on how to reduce the exodus “in order to make the necessary recommendations to our German friends.”<sup>105</sup>

At this point, Ulbricht committed a huge error that undercut his support in Moscow. On May 5, he declared that the GDR had “entered a new stage of a dictatorship of the proletariat.” This socialist rhetoric from East Berlin came at the time when Winston Churchill proposed in the House of Commons holding a conference with the new Soviet leadership. In the eyes of Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, and some other members of the Kremlin ruling group, the new opportunities to split NATO unity stood in open conflict with Ulbricht’s course.<sup>106</sup> This galvanized Presidium discussions on the GDR. On May 14, the Presidium, at Molotov’s suggestion, instructed Ulbricht to refrain from this provocative rhetoric.<sup>107</sup> Simultaneously, Molotov and the Foreign Ministry experts acknowledged the facts presented in Beria’s report.<sup>108</sup> In his internal memo, Semenov agreed that the collectivization of East German agriculture and the practices of mass arrests and repression of large groups should be stopped. He even proposed a partial amnesty. At the same time, the main Soviet interest, in his opinion, was to strengthen, not undermine the GDR Communist leadership.<sup>109</sup> At the Presidium meeting on May 20, Molotov joined in the criticism of the GDR leadership. It appears that he swallowed his doubts and did not want to cause a split in the collective leadership.<sup>110</sup> Ulbricht’s days seemed to be numbered. Scholars now

agree that May–June 1953 was the only time when the Soviet leadership considered a radical change in German policy.

Suddenly, a debate within the collective leadership erupted. At its center was the question: What kind of Germany did the Soviet Union need? On May 27, at the Presidium meeting, Molotov recommended that the SED should “not carry out an accelerated construction of socialism.” No minutes of the meeting are available, but after Beria’s arrest, Molotov told the Party Plenum that Beria interrupted with a remark: “Why do we need this socialism in Germany, what kind of socialism is there? All we need is a bourgeois Germany if it is peaceful.” According to Molotov, other members of the leadership were astonished: they did not believe that bourgeois Germany, the same country that had unleashed two world wars, could be peaceful. Molotov concluded: “How could a sober-thinking Marxist, one who stands on the positions close to socialism or Soviet power, believe in some kind of a bourgeois Germany that would allegedly be peaceful and under the control of four powers?”<sup>111</sup> Khrushchev and Bulganin sided with Molotov.

In his memoirs, Mikoyan recalled that Beria and Malenkov seemed to be in agreement on this issue. “They aimed to gain the leading role in the Presidium, and suddenly there was such a defeat!” Beria allegedly telephoned Bulganin after the meeting and told him he would lose his post of defense minister if he aligned himself with Khrushchev. Beria admitted in his letter from prison that he treated Khrushchev and Bulganin with “unacceptable rudeness and insolence” at the meeting on May 27.<sup>112</sup>

A careful reconstruction of the patchy evidence and the logic of events indicates that on May 27 not only Beria and Malenkov, but also Molotov, Khrushchev, and the rest of the Kremlin leadership, voted for the radical changes in the GDR. Later, when the collective leadership got rid of Beria, they decided that the “treason” on the German Question must be added to the list of his crimes.<sup>113</sup>

The outcome of the discussions within the collective leadership was the state decree of June 2, “On Measures to Improve the Health of the Political Situation in the GDR.” This document differed in content and tone from all the Foreign Ministry drafts, went much further than the SCC recommendations of May 18, and incorporated almost verbatim most of Beria’s memo.<sup>114</sup> It stated that the main reason for the crisis in the GDR was “the mistaken course of the construction of socialism in East Germany without real internal and external conditions.” The document implicitly recognized Stalin’s responsibility for this policy and proposed a sweeping New Course that called for the end of collectivization, a slowdown of “the extraordinary intense pace of development of heavy industry,” and a “sharp increase of the production of mass consumption goods.” It also stipulated a cut in “administrative and special expenses,” stabilization of the

GDR currency, a stop to the arrests and the release of arrested people, and the end of persecution of churches and the restoration of confiscated church property.<sup>115</sup>

The New Course reversed Stalin's policies that aimed at converting East Germany into a bulwark for an imminent war with the West. The future of the GDR was now linked to "the peaceful settlement of fundamental international problems." The Kremlin leadership instructed the GDR leadership "to put the tasks of the political struggle for restoration of national unity of Germany and for conclusion of a peace treaty in the center of attention of the broad masses of German people, both in the GDR and in West Germany."<sup>116</sup>

On June 2–4, an SED delegation secretly arrived in Moscow to receive instructions on the policy change. Ulbricht, sensing he was in danger, attempted to propose cosmetic reforms. At that moment, however, the news about the riots in Bulgaria and the unrest in Czechoslovakia reached the Presidium; this seemed to tilt the Kremlin leadership even more in favor of an immediate reversal of Stalin's policies for the European satellites.<sup>117</sup> According to Otto Grotewohl's notes, Beria said that "we all made the mistake [in 1952]; there are no accusations." Another East German witness, however, recorded Beria's contempt and anger with regard to Ulbricht. Malenkov also was on record saying: "If we don't correct the situation now, a catastrophe will happen." The Kremlin leaders radically scaled down Stalin's plans for the GDR's armament. "No airplanes; no tanks," jotted Grotewohl in his notes of the meeting.<sup>118</sup>

Worst of all, Moscow ordered the SED leadership to introduce the New Course immediately. The GDR leaders cabled home from Moscow the instruction to remove the literature on the "construction of socialism" in East Germany from libraries and bookstores. The Presidium appointed Vladimir Semenov to be high commissioner in East Germany and sent him back on the same plane with the SED delegation to implement the Kremlin orders. The new instructions put the GDR leadership in an impossible political situation. After a year of total mobilization and extreme Stalinist propaganda, they had to beat a retreat immediately, with no time to save face. Molotov even recommended that the press publish "frank criticism" of the SED policies since July 1952.<sup>119</sup> It is astounding how blind the Soviet leaders were to the provocative nature of these measures.

After the arrest of Beria, Khrushchev blamed him for the attempt "to sell out" the GDR. Later, he also claimed that Malenkov was in cahoots with Beria. In his defense, Malenkov made a significant remark clarifying his position: "During the discussion of the German question I believed that in the existing international situation, when we began the big political campaign, for the sake of the issue of reunification of Germany, we must not put forward the task of construction of

socialism in the democratic Germany."<sup>120</sup> The broader historical context highlights the radical potential of the New Course. The first months after Stalin's death were a time of high uncertainty, but also of new opportunities. On June 3, British prime minister Winston Churchill hinted to Soviet ambassador Yakov Malik that he was prepared to begin confidential talks with the new Soviet leadership like the ones he had had with Stalin. He informed Malik that he was about to meet with Eisenhower to sell him on the idea of an immediate summit of great powers to improve the international situation. Churchill said that he believed that he would "succeed to improve international relations and create the atmosphere of greater confidence for at least the next 3–5 years."<sup>121</sup>

Beria and Malenkov seemed to be trying to explore possibilities for relaxation of the Cold War. Beria, in particular, was inclined to use secret police channels to achieve foreign policy goals. He sought to establish a secret back channel to the Yugoslav leader Marshal Tito, who was still vilified by Soviet propaganda as the leader of the "fascist clique." In a desperate note from prison, Beria reminded Malenkov that he "prepared the mission on Yugoslavia" with his consent and advice. The note also mentioned another "mission" in France, implying a request for Pierre Cot, a Soviet agent of influence, to approach the French prime minister, Pierre Mendes-France, with the proposal to start secret talks on the German Question. At that time, France's public opinion and elites were split over the issues of the "European army" and rearmament of West Germany.<sup>122</sup>

Meanwhile, the crisis in the GDR exploded and changed the whole situation. On June 16, workers in East Berlin demonstrated against the GDR regime. Mass rallies quickly became a political uprising all over the GDR; crowds from West Berlin crossed into East Berlin and joined the protesters. The regime lost control of the situation. The use of Soviet troops on June 17 quickly dispersed the crowd and restored order in the capital; gradually the situation in the GDR stabilized. It was the first serious disruption to shake the Soviet bloc after Stalin's death.<sup>123</sup>

At first, it was not clear how these events affected the Soviet leadership and its consensus on the New Course in the GDR. In his memoirs, Sudoplatov claimed that even after the revolt in the GDR, Beria "did not give up on the idea of German reunification." The demonstration of Soviet power "might only increase the chances of the USSR to reach a compromise with Western powers." He sent his agents to West Germany to establish confidential contacts with politicians there.<sup>124</sup> Simultaneously, Marshal Sokolovsky, his deputy high commissioner Semenov, and Pavel Yudin sent a detailed report on the uprising to the Soviet leadership with withering criticism of Ulbricht. The SCC leadership recommended relieving him of the responsibilities of deputy prime minister of the GDR

nd “allow[ing] him to concentrate his attention” on party work. The position of general secretary had to be abolished, and the party secretariat had to be reduced in size.<sup>125</sup>

This last proposal accidentally touched on the very essence of the power struggle in the Kremlin that was about to come to a head. In late May 1953, Nikita Khrushchev, then the head of the Central Committee’s Secretariat, decided that Beria was too dangerous. He began to suspect that the secret police chief was preparing to stab a knife in his back and undermine the Party Secretariat, Khrushchev’s power base. There were also signals that Beria was acting behind the back of Khrushchev in domestic party politics. Khrushchev realized he had to act against Beria. This realization might have dawned on him after the Presidium discussion of the GDR on May 27. Eventually, even Malenkov revealed his misgivings about Beria and joined the plot against him.<sup>126</sup>

The arrest of Beria on June 26 during the meeting of the Presidium of the Council of Ministers profoundly changed the power balance inside the Kremlin. Khrushchev claimed to be the heroic organizer of Beria’s removal. Soviet elites, including the military, acclaimed him as a savior from the years of terror. At the July Party Plenum, convened to denounce Beria, Khrushchev triumphantly proclaimed the primacy of the party apparatus over the state bureaucracies, above all over the secret police. Malenkov, who remained the head of the state, solemnly declared that he never intended to be the number one and that there would be always a “collective leadership.”<sup>127</sup>

Soviet officials in Germany continued to send reports criticizing Ulbricht and his apparatus for lack of political courage and initiative during the uprising.<sup>128</sup> This criticism, however, no longer received a sympathetic hearing and support within the Soviet leadership. Khrushchev respected Ulbricht and believed he was a good comrade. More importantly, Khrushchev and Molotov publicly denounced the idea of a “unified and neutral Germany” as Beria’s conspiracy. Khrushchev declared that Beria “revealed himself on the German question as an *agent-provocateur*, not a Communist, when he proposed to renounce the construction of socialism, to make concessions to the West. Then we asked him: “What does it mean? It means that 18 million Germans would pass under the custody of Americans. And how could there be a neutral democratic bourgeois Germany between Americans and us? If a treaty is not guaranteed by force, then it is worth nothing, and everybody will laugh at us and our naiveté.” The majority of the Soviet party and state elites who attended the Plenum applauded Khrushchev. Most of them had lived through the war and shared Khrushchev’s strong feelings that reunifying Germany on a “bourgeois” foundation would undo the victory of 1945. Others considered East Germany as the jewel of the Soviet bloc because of

its role in the Soviet military-industrial complex. On behalf of the Soviet atomic project, its leader, Avraami Zaveniagin, told the Plenum that “much uranium is extracted in the GDR, perhaps no less than Americans have at their disposal.” He spoke about Soviet dependence on uranium from the Wismut project in lower Saxony.<sup>129</sup>

The new winds immediately affected Soviet policies in the GDR. Molotov’s influence on Soviet foreign policy was on the rise, and Beria’s initiatives, not only in Germany but also in Yugoslavia and Austria, were automatically disavowed and repealed.<sup>130</sup> The Politburo firmly rejected the proposal by SCC authorities to replace Ulbricht and remove the Party Secretariat from state affairs as “untimely.” In Molotov’s opinion, “Semenov drifted to the right.” Sensing the change, Ulbricht immediately cracked down on his domestic rivals. SED Politburo members Rudolf Herrstadt and Wilhelm Zeissner had earned the highest praise from the Soviet Control Commission during the uprising, and, in the opinion of Hope Harrison, “if the Beria episode had not intervened, [they] may have succeeded in their efforts to remove Ulbricht from power.” In this new climate, however, the Soviet leadership supported Ulbricht’s decision to oust them, because they, especially Zeissner, were Beria’s protégés.<sup>131</sup>

American behavior during the revolt in East Germany contributed to the shift in Kremlin policies. On the one hand, the United States made maximum propaganda use of the revolt, supplied food to East Berliners, and began to push for “free elections” as a precondition for German reunification. On the other hand, the United States and the other Western powers did not come to the rescue of the East Germans with military power. Even if the West had indeed prepared “the Day X” in the GDR, as some Soviet analysts were quick to assert, Western leaders did not dare to go all the way in supporting the rebellion.<sup>132</sup>

The entire “peaceful initiative” that justified the New Course in the GDR came to a halt after Beria’s arrest and the revolt in East Germany. Indeed, it was impossible to reduce military forces in Europe without a negotiated solution of the German Question, the conundrum that Soviet leaders would not be able to resolve for the next thirty-five years. The rise of Khrushchev, the survival of Ulbricht, and the demise of the New Course destroyed any opportunity for a turnabout in Soviet policies on East Germany. Millions of Germans had to live through several more decades of the Cold War, waiting for another miracle to allow them to be sovereign, free, and reunited.