

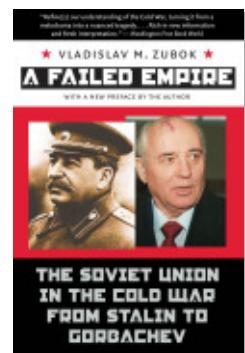


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A Failed Empire

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(CHAPTER I)

THE SOVIET PEOPLE AND STALIN BETWEEN WAR 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-decked 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.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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.⁴

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.⁵ 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.⁶

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.⁷ 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.⁸

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.⁹

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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.”¹²

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.¹³ 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.¹⁴ 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!¹⁵

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.¹⁶ 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!”¹⁷ 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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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.²⁰

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.²¹ 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.”²² 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.²³

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.²⁴

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.²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷ 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?²⁸

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 comradely 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.²⁹ 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.”³⁰ 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.³¹

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.³²

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.³³

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.³⁴ 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.³⁵

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.”³⁶

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.³⁷

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.³⁸ Other Soviet marshals, generals, and secret police chiefs sent home planeloads 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.³⁹

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.⁴⁰ 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.⁴¹

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.⁴² 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 II 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.⁴³

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."⁴⁴ 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."⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷ 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).⁴⁸

The wartime contacts and especially Lend-Lease deliveries confirmed widespread perceptions of the United States as the country possessing exceptional economic-technological power.⁴⁹ 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 1941–42.⁵⁰ 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.”⁵¹ 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.⁵²

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.”⁵³ The vast majority of Soviet officials grew up in a xenophobic and isolationist environment. They spoke Soviet “newspeak”—untranslatable into any other language.⁵⁴ 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."⁵⁵

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.⁵⁶ 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.⁵⁷

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."⁵⁸ 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."⁵⁹ 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."⁶⁰

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.”⁶¹ 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.”⁶²

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?”⁶³

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.⁶⁴

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.⁶⁵ 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.⁶⁶ 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.⁶⁷

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.”⁶⁸

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.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

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.”⁷¹

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.⁷²

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.”⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶ Stalin, as some scholars have long suspected,⁷⁷ 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."⁷⁸

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.⁷⁹ 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.⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹ 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."⁸²

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.⁸³

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.⁸⁴ 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"⁸⁵ 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."⁸⁶

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.⁸⁷ 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 Yerusalimsky, 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.⁸⁸ 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."⁸⁹

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.⁹⁰

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.⁹¹

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."⁹² 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."⁹³

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.”⁹⁴ 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.”⁹⁵ 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.”⁹⁶ 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.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸

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.⁹⁹ 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.¹⁰⁰ 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.”¹⁰¹

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.¹⁰²

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.”¹⁰³ 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.¹⁰⁴

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.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶

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.¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸

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.¹⁰⁹

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.”¹¹⁰

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.¹¹¹ 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.¹¹² 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.¹¹³ 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 Guomindang government in Moscow in July and August 1945.¹¹⁴ The Yalta agreements, acknowledged by Truman, gave the Kremlin leader a position of tremendous superiority with regard to the Guomindang. 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."¹¹⁵

Stalin had some strengths to use inside China in bargaining with the Guomindang. 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."¹¹⁶

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.¹¹⁷

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.¹¹⁸

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.¹¹⁹

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 co-operation 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.¹²⁰

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."¹²¹ 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."¹²²

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 antiaircraft defense, soon followed.¹²³

American historians still argue about a possible Soviet motivation in Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb.¹²⁴ 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-

tainty 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.¹²⁵

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*.