

Inside the ★
Kremlin's Cold War

From Stalin to Khrushchev

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2 Stalin and Shattered Peace

Mao Zedong (commenting on a future Sino-Soviet treaty): But will it interfere with the decisions of the Yalta Conference?

Stalin: To hell with that! If we make a decision to revise treaties, we must go all the way. True, we will have to struggle against the Americans, but we have already reconciled ourselves to that fact.

Stalin-Mao talks in the Kremlin,
January 22, 1950

The shift in Stalin's attitude toward postwar cooperation in 1945–1946 can be attributed in part to his “deep and morbid obsessions and compulsions,” which had lain dormant for a while but eventually pushed him to guarantee Soviet security in expectation of the total collapse of relations between the USSR and the Western democracies. These compulsions were of immense international significance, since the power to dictate Soviet foreign policy—and domestic policy as well—belonged to Stalin alone.¹

One such compulsion was to retain his totalitarian control over the state and society once the war was over. Stalin, reflected the Soviet writer Konstantin Simonov, had “feared a new Decembrism. He had shown Ivan to Europe and Europe to Ivan, as Alexander I did in 1813–1814.”² Indeed, many Soviet soldiers who participated in the liberation of Europe were appalled at how poorly the standard of living in the Soviet Union compared with that of Europe. Many veterans no longer feared the Soviet secret police and would not be silenced. Some, according to an NKVD (secret police) report to Stalin

on January 27, 1946, made anti-Soviet remarks, clashed with local authorities, and even distributed anti-Soviet leaflets.³

Stalin, true to form, moved to eradicate this mood before it could develop into even the slightest threat to his power. Upon their return, millions of the Soviets who had stayed abroad, as prisoners of war or in the forces of European resistance groups, were screened—some were eventually shot, and others were sent to the Gulag to be cleansed of any European influence. All this was done when the “popular” legitimacy of Stalin’s regime was at its peak, and when, for quite a few Soviet citizens, patriotism and preoccupation with Truman’s America, armed with the atomic bomb, overshadowed the frustrations of everyday life.⁴

Another of Stalin’s compulsions was his deep suspicion of the motives of the Western Allies. Stalin, as the Yugoslav Communist Milovan Djilas has noted, feared that “the imperialists” would never tolerate great Soviet advances during the war. As pleased as he was with the outcome of Yalta and Potsdam, he looked forward to the struggle ahead. Stalin’s remarks in his private conversations with Georgi Dimitrov, a trusted leader of the Comintern, betrayed the ambiguity of his feelings. In January 1945 he told Dimitrov: “The crisis of capitalism revealed itself in the division of capitalists into two factions—one fascist, the other democratic . . . Now we side with one faction against the other, and in the future [we will also turn] against this faction of capitalists.” In August he expressed to Dimitrov his satisfaction with Potsdam: “In general these decisions are beneficial to us . . . [Bulgaria] has been recognized as within our sphere of influence.”⁵ Stalin had decided that certain spheres of influence had to be secured by the Soviets before the Western democracies turned against Moscow.

Stalin’s ambivalence seemed increasingly sinister from the Western perspective, and Washington and London began to look at the Soviet expansion sanctioned at Yalta and Potsdam in a completely different light. On June 18, 1946, Maxim Litvinov met with the CBS correspondent Richard C. Hottelet in his office, which was tapped by the Soviet secret police. Litvinov said there was nothing one could do to change the course of Soviet foreign policy. He said that the Soviet leadership had made some wrong decisions and, of the two possible paths toward building a postwar peace, the wrong one had been chosen: “the outmoded concept of security in terms of territory—the

more you've got the safer you are." No Western concessions would satisfy the Soviet leadership. Litvinov concluded: "I now feel that the best that can be hoped for is a prolonged armed truce."⁶

President Truman put the minutes of the meeting in his safe, prohibiting anyone else from seeing them. But his precautions, as it turned out, were in vain. The Soviet secret service taped the conversation and informed the Kremlin about it. "Litvinov stayed alive by chance," Molotov recalled. Stalin knew that Litvinov's death would "create an international scandal, complicating relations with the Allies."⁷

Was there an alternative means to postwar collaboration that Stalin and Molotov discarded, and that could possibly have led "to more cooperative relations with the United States?"⁸ Litvinov's words should be treated with caution. He was not a Cassandra, this old crusty man with great ambitions who was totally excluded from the greatest diplomatic game of the century. At no point did Stalin's demands and ambitions in 1945–1946 exceed the maximum zone of responsibility discussed by Litvinov and Maisky in their memorandums. In fact, in some cases Stalin's moves in the international arena were more modest in scope than those suggested by Litvinov. Litvinov was never a proponent of concessions to the West, particularly in Eastern Europe. The historian Voitech Mastny is correct when he says that, in principle, "there was no quarrel between Litvinov and Stalin, both ardent devotees of power politics."⁹

True, Stalin and Molotov neglected important factors in making foreign policy decisions, particularly Western public opinion, about which the diplomats of the older school tried to warn them. But Litvinov and Maisky, in their geopolitical fantasies, also missed many other important realities that greatly complicated Stalin's relations with Western leaders after the war. Litvinov's proposal of a "neutrality belt" from Norway to Italy, in combination with the dismemberment of Germany, if adopted, could have led to an even greater power vacuum in Europe that would arouse fears and competition between the East and the West.¹⁰

Litvinov, as well as most observers, failed to foresee the nature and direction of America's postwar involvement in the world. In fact, his knowledge of the United States led him to the incorrect assumption that Washington might return to isolationism and withdraw from international organizations. He seemed to think that it would be much easier for the USSR and Great Britain to come to an "amicable

agreement” about the European settlement if the moralistic and expansionist United States would not interfere.¹¹

The key difference between Litvinov and Stalin was to be found, however, in their reactions to the Allies in the postwar period. The sophisticated diplomat Litvinov believed that the Soviet leadership was making a fatal mistake by grabbing what it could instead of preserving the atmosphere of trust and authority established by the Soviets during the war against Hitler. Stalin, driven by his dark foreboding and suspicions, and picking the worst signals from his far-reaching intelligence networks, believed that a policy of partnership with the West had no future. He still did not want confrontation with his former allies, but he did not know how to avoid it.

Two events dramatically altered Stalin’s view of the diplomatic landscape and loosed his demons of suspicion: the first was the death of Roosevelt; the second was America’s dropping of the A-bomb on Hiroshima.

When Stalin had hoped to encourage London and Washington to resolve recurrent tensions by “redistributing spheres of influence,” his dream partner had been Franklin D. Roosevelt. William Taubman correctly sees Roosevelt’s death as “a turning point in Soviet-American relations,” but fails to appreciate how important Roosevelt was to the Soviet dictator.¹² He was the only president whom Stalin accepted as a partner, even when he felt that FDR was scheming behind his back. In April 1945, when Soviet intelligence informed Stalin of Nazi attempts to conclude a separate peace with the Americans, his faith in the possibility of a partnership with the West was not shaken.¹³ As long as the two Western leaders did not, in Stalin’s opinion, “gang up” on him, there remained the chance for an international regime of cooperation.

When Roosevelt died and Churchill was not reelected—a total surprise to the Kremlin—Stalin lost his two equals, the opponents with whom he knew he could play a grand game with a good chance of success. There was no longer a common threat or the great cauldron of European war to forge a strong relationship of equals between Stalin and the new Western politicians. Truman, James Byrnes, Clement Attlee, and Ernest Bevin were obviously not powerful enough (and probably also not cynical enough) for Stalin’s game. In a matter of months what looked like a classic trilateral diplomacy deteriorated before Stalin’s eyes into a hopeless international morass, where many

expectations were swept aside by a host of new faces and factors.¹⁴ This must have been stunning to Stalin, who was used to dealing with a maximum of three players. During the party infighting of 1923–1929 it was Stalin and the Kamenev-Zinoviev group against Trotsky, then Stalin and Bukharin against Kamenev-Zinoviev. This pattern of very few players had continued in the international arena in 1939–1944.¹⁵ Now all was changed.

Truman in particular seemed to be an unknown entity: a rookie president was easy prey for crafty manipulators. Yet Stalin did not abandon his hopes for a grand game or “détente.” He tested Truman at Potsdam and, after hard bargaining, “got what [he] wanted” on two key issues: reparations from Germany and the future of Poland. Many years later Molotov admitted that, at that moment, “the Americans provided us with a way out that reduced tension between us and our Western allies.”¹⁶ Yet this was not to be.

It was the atomic bombardment of Japan and the abrupt end of the war in the Pacific that convinced Stalin that his dream of a postwar partnership was not to be fulfilled. The old demons of insecurity were back. The atomic bomb threw the Kremlin leader off balance—and eventually back into the curse of tyrants: neurotic solitude.

The Bomb

After the American bombing of Japan, Stalin told the managers of a future Soviet atomic complex: “Hiroshima has shaken the whole world. The balance has been broken. Build the Bomb—it will remove the great danger from us.”¹⁷ This appeal from Stalin is reminiscent of his plea to Soviet “brothers and sisters” in the wake of Hitler’s attack on the Soviet Union. David Holloway’s understanding of Stalin’s “atomic” logic concludes that before Potsdam, and perhaps even Hiroshima, “neither Stalin, Beria, nor Molotov understood the role that the atomic bomb would soon play in international relations.” Like the German attack in June 1941, “the atomic bomb also caught Stalin by surprise, in spite of the detailed intelligence the Soviet Union had obtained about the Manhattan project.”¹⁸

For all the new research and evidence, it is still not clear why the shrewd and well-informed dictator had missed the tremendous potential of the “super weapon.” Some possible reasons are masterfully discussed by Holloway: Stalin mistrusted Soviet scientists and their

“fantasies”; he was under enormous pressure from the war with Germany, and only those projects that helped to win the war gained top priority with him; and he and his chief of security policy, Beria, suspected that much of the intelligence on the Manhattan project could be “disinformation.”¹⁹

Stalin, like Hitler, was suspicious of projects that did not promise fast returns. Indifferent to the loss of human lives (the Red Army had suffered appalling and unnecessary casualties even in the final battles of the war), he saved the state’s money with the greed of Shylock.²⁰ But also, perhaps, the Kremlin leader hoped to win the war and secure the gains of peace before the mysterious uranium bomb was built. After Yalta, on February 28, 1945, Vladimir Merkulov, the commissar of the Ministry of State Security (NKGB), reported to Beria (who briefed Stalin): “No time-frame of any certainty is available for the production of the first bomb, since research or design work has not been completed. It is suggested that the production of such a bomb will require one year at least and five years at most.” The first report about an imminent atomic test reached Stalin just as he was leaving for Potsdam.²¹

Had Stalin entrusted his feelings to a diary, he would have filled the whole page of August 6 with profanities, directed at the Americans in general, and Truman in particular. The Bomb was dropped on the Japanese city of Hiroshima at the worst possible moment: the Kremlin leader was in the midst of tough bargaining with the Allies. “Stalin had his doubts about whether the Americans would keep their word,” recalled Nikita Khrushchev later. “What if Japan capitulated before we entered the war? The Americans might say, we don’t owe you anything.” Holloway cites this as evidence that Stalin feared the Americans and the British would “renege on the Yalta agreement,” which was contingent on Soviet participation in the war.²² This is another sign that the dictator was still inclined to maintain a *quid pro quo* relationship with Western allies.

Stalin had to be equally concerned about the future of his conquests in the East. He contemplated a *Blitzkrieg* against Japan that would ensure for the Soviet Union a zone of security in Outer Mongolia, Manchuria, North Korea, and perhaps even Northern Japan. The best guarantee for this was the impressive force of the Red Army. Two sea powers, Great Britain and the United States, stood no chance against the USSR as the only remaining land power. In his January 1944 letter

to the Kremlin leadership, Maisky defined this as one of the most significant outcomes of the Second World War. "Two oceans," he wrote, "lie between the USSR and the United States, which make our country relatively invulnerable to American aviation (at least during the first postwar period)." (Of course, Americans could promote "the resurgence of Germany and Japan," but this was a distant threat.)²³ Maisky was actually referring to the well-known geopolitical concept of oceanic versus land nations, stressing that the geographical separation, given the current level of technology, provided for the USSR's security, with the oceans serving as a Great Divide. He knew nothing about the Bomb already on its way.

In August 1945, however, the Americans vividly demonstrated to Stalin and many Russians that they could threaten the Soviet Union in the not-so-distant future. From bases in Europe and the Middle East, the U.S. Air Force, armed with atomic bombs, could reach and destroy vital centers of the Soviet Union. It did not take much imagination to understand that further military progress would make Stalin's vast empire vulnerable to a devastating surprise attack from the air.

On August 6, Svetlana Alliluyeva recalled later, the "usual visitors" (Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, and so on) came to Stalin's dacha and told her father that the Americans had dropped a bomb on Hiroshima. Three months earlier Svetlana had had a baby—Stalin's first grandson. But on this day Grandfather Joseph hardly listened to her: "everybody was preoccupied" with the news of the atomic blast. Yuli Khariton, one of the creators of the first Soviet atomic bomb, today starkly describes the mood of that day: "The Soviet government interpreted [Hiroshima] as atomic blackmail against the USSR, as a threat to unleash a new, even more terrible and devastating war."²⁴

Two days later Stalin and Molotov received Averell Harriman and George Kennan. Since Potsdam, when Truman had told him about the testing of a "new weapon," Stalin had assumed the mien of a wise statesman, which had helped him so much in his dealings with the Allies. He never tried to minimize the Bomb's global importance. In fact he admitted, in his talk with Harriman, that the Bomb could end the war in the Pacific; it could give the Japanese a pretext to surrender. Stalin also acknowledged that the Germans had failed to construct an atomic bomb, and that, had they not failed, "Hitler would never have surrendered." He told the Americans, without any prompting, that

Soviet scientists had tried to build an atomic bomb, but had also failed. He agreed that the Allies should keep the Bomb in peacetime: "that would mean the end of war and aggressors." But, he added, "the secret would have to be well kept."²⁵

Stalin seemed to be saying, "You have your Bomb, I have my Red Army. Let's recognize each other's power and base our relationship on that recognition. We do not complain that you and the British kept this a secret from us." But the real Stalin understood that the Bomb placed the scepter of power in the hands, not even of Roosevelt or Churchill, but of that "petty shopkeeper" Truman and his sly advisor, Secretary of State James Byrnes. As a realist, Stalin had to reckon with this historical fact. But, being Stalin, he could never forgive it and was determined, with his usual patience, to prepare his comeback.²⁶

The "absolute weapon" forced profound revisions in Stalin's thinking. The probability of an American return to isolationism, something that had seemed so crucial in the Kremlin's calculations, lost much of its sense after Hiroshima. What difference did it make if American troops returned home or not, demobilized in part or in full, if atomic capabilities and means of delivery were now available and would only increase with time? The security belt of friendly regimes around the Soviet Union acquired a new urgency—American bombers could reach into Soviet territory anyway, but at least it would take them more time to do so. Stalin decided to respond to the American atomic monopoly with deliberate scorn and arrogance. Since September 1945, he and Molotov had begun a preemptive attack against Secretary of State James Byrnes, whom they regarded as a main advocate of "atomic diplomacy" aimed at squeezing concessions from the USSR in a postwar settlement in Europe.

Stalin's major rethinking, however, concerned the small Soviet atomic project, languishing under Molotov's tutelage since May 1943. In August 1945 Stalin directed all state resources to break the American monopoly. He gave Beria, the custodian of the NKVD-GULAG machinery, extraordinary powers to marshal any resources necessary to build the Bomb. But the project "must remain under the control of the Central Committee and must work in strict secrecy," Stalin said to Boris Vannikov, a future head of the First Chief Directorate of the Council of Ministers of the USSR, a new atomic superagency. "This business must be undertaken by the entire Party."²⁷

On January 25, 1946, Stalin invited Igor Kurchatov, a scientific

manager of the atomic project, to his office in the Kremlin. In the presence of Beria and Molotov, the Kremlin host told the physicist that atomic work should be done quickly "on a broad front, on a Russian scale, and that in this respect all possible help will be provided." Kurchatov came away impressed most of all by "the great love of Comrade Stalin for Russia and V. I. Lenin, about whom he spoke in terms of his great hope for the development of science in our country."²⁸

Stalin's decision to embark on a massive program of rearmament, triggered by Hiroshima, was a monumental shift that entailed different policies, both internal and external, from those he had been pursuing previously. Today we know that it meant an unprecedented set of decisions, on the highest state and political level, that would alter drastically the relations between Stalin's police state and the scientific community. It produced a quantum leap in the organization and technological sophistication of many sectors of the Soviet economy and ultimately created a modern Soviet military-industrial complex. In practical terms, it meant finding the ways and means to excavate hundreds of thousands of tons of uranium ore, to build huge uranium processing plants, to accumulate "pure" graphite, to build nuclear reactors, plutonium "factories," and a design bureau to deal with the theory, development, and assembly of atomic weapons. Such goals required millions of workers, billions of rubles in investment, as well as the creation from scratch of a high-tech electrochemical industry and a hasty upgrading of metallurgical, power, and other industries.

In light of this large-scale transformation, the speech Stalin gave in the Bolshoi Theater two weeks after his meeting with Kurchatov, a speech that greatly alarmed the Americans, was a significant understatement. In reality, the dictator was commanding and executing another "revolution from above": on the ashes of peasant Russia and amid the rubble of a war-torn country he ordered the creation of a nuclear superpower.

Stalin had plunged into his own atomic enterprise even before the Truman administration and the British government developed any policy on international control of atomic energy. Later, when Stalin learned through his excellent network of agents that Truman and Attlee opposed any sharing of atomic secrets with the Soviet Union, he must have felt vindicated in his worst fears. By the end of 1945

the expression "Anglo-Saxon alliance of atomic powers" became popular in communications between the Soviet embassy in Washington and Moscow.²⁹ Stalin publicly spoke about the possibility and desirability of international control over atomic weapons. But even if the U.S. administration, over the opposition of influential senators, the military, and those heading the atomic project, had agreed to reach a secret understanding with Moscow, it is unlikely that Stalin would have been satisfied with anything less than an equal partnership. This would have meant Washington's recognition of the USSR as another atomic power, and its consent to restoration of the "correlation of forces" that had satisfied Stalin before Hiroshima.

The Bomb destroyed Stalin's expectations of being second to none among the great powers and of promoting Soviet state interests through partnership with the Western powers. Yet the goal of building a secure periphery around the USSR remained and called for other means and new vision. On May 8, 1946, Stalin sent a letter to a leader of the Democratic party of Azerbaijan, a Soviet-sponsored organization struggling for the secession of northern areas of Iran. He admitted that there was no revolutionary situation in Iran "that would have allowed the use of Lenin's tactics of 1905 and 1917." At the same time, he wrote, if Soviet troops had decided to stay in Iran, it would have "undercut the basis of our liberationist policies in Europe and Asia. The British and the Americans would say that if Soviet troops could stay in Iran, then why couldn't British troops stay in Egypt, Syria, Indonesia, and Greece, and American troops in China, Iceland, and Denmark? So we decided to pull our troops out of Iran and China, in order to grab this weapon from the hands of the British and the Americans and unleash a movement of liberation in colonies that would render our policy of liberation more justified and efficient."³⁰

For the Russian historian who published this remarkable letter, it proved that Stalin had only limited goals in Iran and did not seek territorial expansion there.³¹ That is true, and Stalin in 1946 kept restraining "revolutionaries," not only in Iran, but also in Greece and other places where he did not want to provoke premature confrontation with the British and the Americans. But we see here another sign of Stalin's return, after a period of several years, to the old paradigm of Soviet security that aimed at the expansion of Soviet influence through promotion of revolutions and processes of decolonization. Stalin was back to his role of pontiff of all the world's revolutionaries.

Behind his prudent (and one must add mendacious) exhortations lurked the old stratagem: Stalin wanted a breathing spell of several years in order to rearm. The Kremlin leader knew about U.S. demobilization, and the very slow growth of the American atomic arsenal after the war.³²

From a realpolitik viewpoint, the best tactic for Stalin would have been to avoid confrontation with the West until the Soviet atomic project started to bear fruit. At the same time, Stalin, a true Leninist, looked at his former partners in the struggle with Hitler as a shaky coalition of two imperialist powers, with conflicting priorities in many parts of the world, particularly the Middle East and Southeast Asia. For tactical reasons he preferred not to meddle in their affairs until, and only until, they stopped challenging his sphere of influence in Central Europe. But he did not mind encouraging, at no cost to himself, the collapse of British, French, and Dutch colonial domains in Asia, from Indochina and Indonesia to India, in expectation that this process would distract attention from his interests and sap the strength not only of London but eventually of Washington as well.

Stalin must have hoped that with the atomic bomb in his hands and with the revolutionary process in Asia under his control he could restore the shattered "correlation of forces" and, perhaps, divide his imperialist rivals or otherwise bend them to compromise with him on his terms. Instead, as was the case with Hiroshima, events once again forced his hand. He seemed not to expect that tensions between Moscow and Washington would flare up so quickly over the future of postwar Europe and conquered Germany. But there the Cold War started, before Stalin could get his Bomb.

Stalin's Road to the Cold War

Stalin's diplomatic achievements at the end of the Second World War so impressed contemporaries and adversaries that many overlooked the fact that his diplomacy, when it could not be supported by the blood of millions of Soviet soldiers and civilians, was a dubious success. The Russian mystic philosopher Daniil Andreev was one of the first at the end of the 1950s to notice this: "An agent of a particular dark genius, which revealed itself in all that related to practicing tyranny, [Stalin] turned out to possess no talents of statesmanship beyond the mediocre ones. Stalin was a bad master of the land, a bad

diplomat, a bad leader of the Party, a bad statesman.” In a recent study the Norwegian historian Odd Arne Westad came to the conclusion that “Joseph Stalin’s China policy in the fall of 1945 was as aimless and incoherent as his European policy. However much he hoped to avoid postwar confrontation with the United States, Stalin could . . . not make up his mind how to achieve his aim.”³³

This view gives important insight into the impact of Stalin’s persona on the origins of the Cold War. Historians may also wonder whether the conflagration of the Cold War was at least in part caused by Stalin’s poor diplomacy. Even at the peak of his international prestige, in 1945–1946, he could have performed better. He failed to obtain oil concessions in Iran just when he believed he had a deal in his pocket. His diplomatic pressure on Turkey caused him great problems with the West. Later in 1948 his attempt to remove Tito in Yugoslavia by means of “Communist diplomacy” backfired and only weakened the position of the Socialist camp vis-à-vis its imperialist adversaries.

Stalin’s policy in Germany also falls into this category, if one considers the goals and the means with which the Kremlin leader had approached the issue of a German settlement, and compares them with the results he achieved by 1949, the moment Germany was divided into two states. Vladimir Semyonov and Valentin Falin, two senior Soviet experts on Germany, had always believed that throughout his life Stalin clung to the firm conviction that the security of the USSR in the West could be guaranteed not through the partition of Germany, but through the transformation of Germany as a whole into a peaceful state.³⁴ The experts may not be far off the mark.

At the end of the Second World War Stalin predicted, this time correctly, that Germany would be back on its feet in fifteen to twenty years. It seemed unthinkable to him that the people who had demonstrated such stunning energy in the fields of science, technology, and the economy, had conquered Europe and almost crushed the Soviet empire, would remain weak and paralyzed for long. According to the provisions agreed upon at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences, the Allies divided Germany into four occupation zones, three for themselves, and one for the Soviet Union. Yet Stalin rejected the idea of neutralizing Germany by keeping it dismembered—an idea that was supported by Litvinov and Maisky, among others. He wanted a new Germany to become his ally, and until then he was prepared to keep the Soviet zone of occupation permanently, while doing everything to

neutralize any threat that the revanchist forces in West Germany could pose to the USSR. In Old Bolshevik party terms, he had "program-maximum" and "program-minimum."

On June 4, 1945, at a meeting with German veterans of the disbanded Comintern, selected by the NKVD to help the Soviets restore order in the occupied territories, Stalin said there would be "two Germanies."³⁵ He wanted to establish Soviet hegemony in the USSR's zone of occupation. Then he hoped to undermine British influence in West Germany, which would not be difficult, provided that American troops withdrew from Europe. As the endgame, he had in mind a unified, "friendly" Germany, leaning toward the USSR.

Between May 1945 and the fall of 1946 Stalin's strategy seemed to be playing itself out nicely. The decision of the Allies at Potsdam to treat Germany as an economic unity favored his approach. Stalin expected a quick withdrawal of Western, particularly U.S., occupational troops, a reunification of Germany under elected administrative bodies of some kind, and subsequent Allied control over the direction of Germany's future.

After the Soviets successfully restored order, by distributing food and organizing political parties and trade unions in the Soviet zone, Stalin's plan began to hit one snag after another. The chief problem was that, though Stalin seemed to want to win the Germans over with bread and Social-Democratic propaganda, many Soviet actions in Germany contradicted such a policy. Certain aspects of this behavior, like the hooliganism of the occupational troops, Stalin could not and did not want to control, since he took any criticism of the Soviet army as criticism aimed at him, the Generalissimo. But another aspect—the plight of six million German refugees who were fleeing annexed Prussia and Silesia for East Germany, disrupting life there—clearly was the result of Stalin's policies. Other negative results included the dismantling of East German industry and the forced recruitment of scientists, engineers, and workers into various Soviet-run projects, in Saxony as well as in secret laboratories inside the USSR.³⁶

Soviet propagandists, the "political commissars" of East Germany, tried to explain their growing difficulties in winning the Germans' trust as the result of a lack of coordination among various arms of the Soviet state acting in Germany. But from 1946 to early 1947, Stalin, strangely enough, did little to ameliorate this situation. Perhaps he expected that the postwar crisis of capitalism would help him out

by shattering U.S. power and diminishing American interest in Germany and Western Europe in general. This is plausible, but hard evidence is still missing. It is also plausible that Stalin was in a difficult position at that time. In the long run he needed the friendship of Germany, but in the short run he needed East German resources for his rearmament projects. Later, Molotov referred to this predicament: "Quietly, bit by bit, we had been creating the GDR, our own Germany. What would those people [East Germans] think of us if we had taken everything from their country? . . . After all, we were taking from the Germans who wanted to work with us. The situation should have been handled very carefully." Molotov admitted that many of the Soviet reparation policies undermined the new Germany the Soviets wanted to build, but stressed that the German booty helped the USSR.³⁷ Meanwhile, as Moscow's German policy came adrift, the United States began to take steps to separate West Germany economically from East Germany. The Americans wanted to restore economic life in the Western zones while preventing the refunneling of American resources from Germany to the Soviet Union through reparations.

Stalin's method of implementing Soviet occupational policies, though it reflected his bent on one-man control, was actually quite flexible and effective. In the case of East Germany, Stalin clearly could not deal personally with the myriad problems of the occupation. At the same time he did not want any powerful political figures to run those policies on his behalf. Vladimir Semyonov, a top political commissar in the Soviet military administration in Germany after the Second World War, recalls that Stalin had some success in turning SMAG into a semi-autonomous organization (autonomous, of course, from his lieutenants, not from himself). Stalin quite often called Sokolovsky and Semyonov on a high-frequency telephone in order to give them instructions, but in most cases the two men were free to act on their own initiative.³⁸ Yet even with the best administrative models the Kremlin leadership could not eliminate major problems that plagued their policies; nor could they foresee the unwillingness of many Germans, and certainly of the West, to let Stalin build "his own" Germany.

Stalin wanted to stop the separation of Germany into East and West. He was able to look beyond the temporary split of Germany to a time when it would be reunited and resurgent. This reunification, he thought, could take two forms: either Germany would be in the

friendly but tight embrace of the Soviet Union, or it would reemerge as a militarist state, a threat to the USSR. In 1870 Otto von Bismarck had united Germany by waging a series of wars against those powers who stood in the way of unification. Stalin believed that any division of Germany would give grounds for the reemergence of "new Bismarcks" and German militarism. Therefore, in 1947 and even in 1949, he rejected proposals to adopt a program of rapid Sovietization for the Soviet zone of occupation, a policy that could divide Germany economically and, as a consequence, politically.³⁹

At the sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Moscow in April 1947, Molotov told Western representatives that the Soviet Union would agree to the revival of the Ruhr, if part of its production went to the Soviets in the form of reparations. But the vast majority of policy-makers in Washington categorically objected to this idea, and the conference, like that of September 1945, was in a deadlock. Stalin met with the new U.S. Secretary of State, George C. Marshall, but instead of talking about a deal, he chose to temporize. Perhaps he really expected that the West would eventually compromise with him, rather than decide on a separatist German policy. But the Truman administration had already decided to rebuild the Western zones of Germany without Stalin and, if necessary, against his will. It announced the Marshall Plan for European recovery in full expectation that Stalin and Molotov would boycott it, thereby freeing the Americans from any commitments to their former partner.

For Stalin the Marshall Plan was a watershed. He had been concerned by indications that the United States was seeking to expand its influence in Iran; by the vigorous American reaction to Soviet pressure on Turkey; and, after the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine in the spring of 1947, by the swift substitution of the British presence in Greece. All these events threw cold water on the hope that the United States and the British empire would be entangled in a protracted redivision of markets and resources after the war. The Marshall Plan was, from Stalin's point of view, a large-scale attempt by the United States to gain lasting and preeminent influence in Europe—again, contrary to all expectations of the Soviet wartime planners. Stalin also saw behind the plan a far-reaching design to revive German military-industrial potential and to direct it, as in the 1930s, against the Soviet Union. Stalin told the Czechoslovak delegation in July 1947 that the former Western Allies were now trying to restore the Ruhr, a British

zone of occupation in Germany, to convert it into the industrial base of the Western bloc.⁴⁰ The Marshall Plan was a serious challenge to Stalin's vision of a future Europe, as well as to German-Soviet relations; essentially, it was a challenge on the same strategic scale as the U.S. atomic monopoly.

From the moment the Marshall Plan was proclaimed, Stalin's old xenophobia, already reawakened by the Bomb, seemed to grow stronger. When the leadership of Czechoslovakia, including some Communists, momentarily hesitated before canceling its participation in the Marshall Plan conference, Stalin was enraged. He wanted to see the Czechoslovaks in the Kremlin at once. In brutal terms, he ordered Klement Gottwald, a leader of the Czechoslovak Communists, to cancel immediately Czechoslovak plans for American aid. Gottwald, of course, complied. When Stalin met with the rest of the delegation, he had regained control of himself, and was once again benign and calm.⁴¹

Stalin's turn to ham-handed imperialism and an overt anti-American campaign after the Marshall Plan was made in haste, but not in panic. Like his strikes against the domestic seeds of Decembrism, this was a preemptive course, dictated by a powerful, security-obsessed mind. The Kremlin leader wanted to eliminate even the remote possibility of a threat to the Soviet zone of security in Central Europe. The best way to do this, of course, was through a show of strength: a brutal Soviet counteroffensive in response to the American politico-economic offensive.

Under these circumstances, a division of Germany into East and West would constitute for Stalin a major geopolitical defeat that would be particularly damaging in view of the continued American atomic monopoly. For Stalin, accepting this defeat would be worse than risking a confrontation with the only country to possess the Bomb. After the Western powers agreed in late 1947 to proceed with the formal foundation of a German state in their occupational zones, Stalin began to squeeze them out of Berlin by gradually imposing a blockade on the sectors under their control. Stalin's reasoning was crude and obvious: joint, four-partite administration of Germany and its capital was the result of the Yalta-Potsdam agreements; if the Western partners violated it in their zones, why should Stalin not do the same in his own? In March 1948 the Generalissimo received the leaders of the Soviet-installed Party of Socialist German Unity (SED).

One of them, Wilhelm Pieck, warned that the next elections in Berlin, scheduled for October, could end in a humiliating defeat for his party. The results might be different, however, "if one could remove the Allies from Berlin." Stalin then said, "Let's make a joint effort—perhaps we can kick them out."⁴² As a tactician, Stalin left all options open. He preferred first to oust the former Allies from the city, and only then to bargain with them on a German settlement.

By June 1948 the noose around West Berlin was tightening, but the Truman administration refused again to recognize Stalin's quid pro quo in Germany. U.S. propaganda turned the Berlin blockade into incriminating evidence of the ruthlessness and inhumanity of the Soviet regime. The U.S. Air Force demonstrated its stunning superiority by supplying West Berlin for many months with everything it needed.

Stalin never planned to start a war over Berlin, but he had to accept his defeat. In May 1949 he lifted the blockade. Khrushchev called the results of Stalin's policy "a failure," and said that "an agreement was signed that made our position in West Berlin worse." He was right. Until then the Soviets could refer to the documents of the Allied Control Commission in Germany which stated that Berlin, although the place of residence for this temporary body, still remained the capital of the Soviet zone of occupation.⁴³ In 1949 Stalin recognized the de facto permanent Western political rights in Berlin, and agreed, in a separate protocol, to the division of the city into West and East.

Stalin's stubborn refusal to face the failure of his German diplomacy led to an even greater defeat for Soviet foreign policy in West Berlin. The outcome of the Berlin blockade, of course, was much more disastrous to Soviet security interests than Khrushchev wanted to concede. The majority of countries in Western Europe, terrified by the "red menace," turned to the United States for protection, and thus NATO, an alliance of democratic countries that outlived the Soviet Union, came into existence—and constituted the Soviet military's biggest problem for four decades. Stalin's clumsy pressure put off those Germans who otherwise would have vacillated and perhaps even followed the pied piper of the Kremlin on the road toward German reunification under Soviet tutelage.

Stalin's actions in 1947–1948 were based on the correct assumption that he was not risking a war with the West. But he had miscalculated the effect of his preventive moves. Did he expect that his pressure

would only contribute to the consolidation of the Western camp around the United States? Was he a willing captive of the Marxist belief that contradictions among capitalist powers would prevent their integration into the anti-Soviet bloc? Had he underestimated the role of nuclear technology, which, by virtue of its costs, was forcing other Western countries to huddle under the U.S. atomic umbrella?

We can only guess. Stalin saw the emerging bipolarity by 1947. But, judging from what he wrote and how he acted, he definitely did not believe that this bipolarity would last long, and he still envisaged “antagonisms” in the Western camp. In any case, it is fair to suggest that from 1947 on Stalin regarded the consolidation of the two blocs and the relative growth of the U.S. influence in Europe as a foregone conclusion. On his part, he attempted brutally to force the West into some kind of settlement in Germany and began consolidating his war gains in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Losing those gains was his primary fear; to avoid it, he was prepared to pay any price, to endure confrontation with the West.

In the categories of “good guys and bad guys,” Stalin was indisputably a bad guy in the Cold War. But he was also a bad guy during World War II and before it—and the West had gladly accepted him as he was, for it needed his strength and found it easier to cope with the chaotic Europe of 1943–1945 using nineteenth-century methods, that is, regulating international relations by the concert of great powers. Stalin thought he had done well when he occupied Eastern Prussia and preserved the lands conquered before the war. But now the West perceived him as bad, and Stalin felt threatened by this shift in attitude among his former allies.

According to Molotov, Stalin had built a strict logical chain: “The First World War pulled one country out of capitalist slavery. The Second World War created a Socialist system, the third will put an end to imperialism once and for all.”⁴⁴ Stalin’s thinking was not, as many interpreted, an invitation to war, but rather the theoretical fatalism of the aging potentate who sought in the Laws of History the ultimate revenge on his former imperialist allies. The statement about the interconnection between War and Revolution would seem trivial even for a Marxist: Lenin had formulated this dogma already during World War I. But by the late 1940s Joseph Stalin was again turning to ideology to explain a hostile and uncertain world.

Triumph in the East

The revival of the Soviet revolutionary-imperial paradigm had begun in early 1946, when Stalin started to shift from a postwar imperialist partnership to the search for unilateral security. But only after the announcement of the Marshall Plan, in the fall of 1947, did Stalin decide to accept the paradigm in all its implications. He began to use revolutions ("revolutions from above," in his classic style) as the chief means to build a security zone around the USSR. He began to look for new allies who would be united with the USSR in a monolithic Communist bloc, capable of withstanding the pressures of a new prewar situation.

Stalin characteristically opened this new chapter in his career with purges. His biggest target abroad, Tito, refused to be "purged," and this resulted in the Soviet-Yugoslav split in the first half of 1948. Although this rift constituted a loss for Stalin, in general he could control European "revolutionarism" as he liked. It was Asia, with its simmering revolutionary nationalism, that taught Stalin a lesson: you can make the revolutionary process serve your foreign policy, but only at your own risk and with serious, unintended consequences. Soon dramatic developments in the Far East forced Stalin in a way he perhaps had never expected or planned.

On Sunday, June 25, 1950, the North Korean army invaded South Korea in an attempt to reunify the country by force. "The North Koreans wanted to prod South Korea with the point of a bayonet," Khrushchev recalled. Molotov remembered that the Korean War "was pressed on us by the Koreans themselves. Stalin said it was impossible to avoid the national question of a united Korea."⁴⁵ The most dangerous conflict of the Cold War, which the West interpreted as blatant, Soviet-made aggression, a possible prelude to invasion in Europe, was not Stalin's brainchild. Yet the Kremlin leader supported North Korea's aggression, since he decided it would advance the geopolitical position of the Soviet Union in the Far East and strengthen the prestige of the USSR as a revolutionary vanguard.

Since the spring of 1949 Kim Il Sung, the leader of the North Korean revolutionary puppet regime, had begged Stalin for his blessing in initiating a "reunification of Korea," after the example set by the Chinese Communists in their civil war against the Guomindang, Stalin argued against this, but gradually he conceded. On January 30,

1950, after one particularly emotional plea from the impatient Kim, Stalin signaled to the Soviet representative in Pyongyang, Terenty Shtykov, his agreement to see the North Korean Communist and look upon his proposal favorably. "Such big business regarding South Korea," he wrote to Shtykov, "requires serious preparation."⁴⁶ According to this classified Soviet account, Stalin still had "reservations" about the North Korean invasion, but "did not object in principle." Kim arrived in Moscow at the end of March and stayed until April, arguing to Stalin that the regime of South Korea was weak militarily and politically, and that the "revolutionary situation" in South Korea was ripe. Massive discontent with the government of Syngman Rhee, supported by the United States, the ever-present "fifth column," and the low combat readiness of the Southern army all seemed to guarantee a quick and painless success.

After the meeting Stalin ordered the immediate fulfillment of all North Korean demands for arms and ammunition. His orders allowed the North Korean army to increase by many divisions in just two months. Soviet generals designed the plan of attack. At the outbreak of the war, the North was far superior militarily to the South. It had twice as many troops and artillery pieces, seven times as many heavy machine guns, six and a half times as many armored vehicles, and six times as many war planes. Soviet military planners, together with Kim's military, believed that North Korean troops could advance by fifteen to twenty kilometers per day and could accomplish their task in three to four weeks. By the end of May the Korean army was about to be deployed. According to one classified Soviet account, the attack was scheduled for June 25 "at [Kim's] insistence, before the rainy season could ruin the enterprise."⁴⁷

Why did Stalin go along with Kim, when earlier, in 1945–1947, he had denied similar support to the Communist guerillas in Greece and Vietnam, and had in 1949 given a cold shoulder to Kim's plans? How had he, an experienced tactician, allowed young Kim to have his way? And why did the USSR allow the United States to legitimize the military counterstrike under the auspices of the United Nations? The main roots of Kim's aggression lay in the artificial division of the country and the simmering civil war on the Korean peninsula.⁴⁸ Yet Kim could not start the war without Stalin's agreement and Soviet supplies, training, and planning. Stalin's calculations, as well as Kim's, were responsible for this tragedy.⁴⁹

The prelude to the Korean War came in December 1949, when Mao Zedong, the leader of the Communist party of China (CCP) and the victor of the civil war against the Guomindang, arrived in Moscow to establish a unique relationship between the Soviet Union and the newly proclaimed People's Republic of China (PRC). Until his death, Stalin dealt personally with all problems, big and small, between the Soviet Union and the Chinese Communists.⁵⁰ He was not in a hurry to support the Chinese Communist cause of Mao Zedong, the leader of a relatively independent and undeniably strong revolutionary Communist movement. He had his doubts about Mao, regarding him as excessively independent, with his roots in peasant revolt rather than proletarian revolution. In 1956 Mao complained, in conversation with the Soviet ambassador Pavel Yudin, that Stalin's "mistrust and suspiciousness may have been provoked by the Yugoslav events [the split with Tito]." Mao added in irritation that "at that time there were many rumors that the Chinese Communist party would go the Yugoslav way, that Mao Zedong was a 'Chinese Tito.'" ⁵¹

In 1943–1946, when Stalin still nurtured his vision of a *realpolitik* partnership with the Western Allies, the Chinese Revolution was an unwelcome intruder into his plans. He preferred to deal with the Guomindang, while exploiting its weakness to his own advantage, until he could come to terms with Chiang and the Americans about a Soviet zone of security in Manchuria and Xinjiang.

Stalin expected to "obtain" Manchuria by virtue of its liberation by the Red Army from the Japanese. In November 1944 in Xinjiang, populated by Muslims and adjacent to Soviet Central Asia, the Soviets had supported a separatist rebellion, and since that time controlled the area.⁵² Stalin received regular briefings on the Xinjiang rebellion from Lavrenty Beria, the chief of his secret police. In the Stalin-Guomindang negotiations in Moscow in July–August 1945 about a treaty of friendship and alliance, the Kremlin leader used the Red Army assault in Manchuria and his control over northern Xinjiang as bargaining chips to obtain all the concessions he wanted. He used the Chinese Communist party as his third bargaining chip, since the Guomindang officials openly wanted him to restrain Mao. In 1945 Stalin tried to invite Chiang Kai-shek to Moscow. He declined to see Mao, under various pretexts, until November 1949.⁵³

In 1945–1946 Stalin reserved the same cool attitude toward lesser revolutionary movements and leaders. He called the Greek leftist

rebellion “foolishness”: the Anglo-Americans would never tolerate a “red” Greece threatening their vital communications to the Middle East.⁵⁴ Ho Chi Minh failed to get Stalin’s support for his schemes of liberation in Vietnam, probably because this also would have threatened British interests, and because Vietnam was well beyond the reach of the Soviet Union. The Kremlin leader sent arms to the Yugoslav and Chinese Communists, but he wanted them to simmer, not boil over the real and perceived boundaries of influence existing among imperialist powers in the Mediterranean and Indochina.

Only after the beginning of the Cold War, when all chances for reconciliation with the West were lost and he faced the need to find new partners and allies, did Stalin begin to reassess Mao, who then was clearly on the winning side in the war against the Guomindang. As we learn more details about the origins of the Sino-Soviet alliance, it becomes stunningly clear that from the very beginning the relations between the two Communist giants were greatly marred by Stalin’s search for one-sided security advantages for the Soviet Union, as well as a position of superiority for himself in the Communist world. Stalin’s decision to shake Mao’s hand in 1949 was one of hard-boiled realism, but once it happened, the partnership between the Kremlin leader and the leader of the Chinese Revolution inevitably became a test between the Soviet paradigm and a no less exceptionalist Chinese revolutionary nationalism.

Stalin began to think of Mao as a potential ally in January 1949, when the Berlin blockade had failed miserably. Still, he attempted to impose on Mao Soviet mediation between the CCP and the Guomindang (while discrediting similar efforts by the United States), and even the idea of a “coalition government” between the two. When Mao rejected or ignored these schemes, Stalin sent one of his men, Anastas Mikoyan, on a secret visit to Mao’s camp (January 31–February 7). Ostensibly a mission of good will, this was, in reality, a trip to take stock of a new partner.⁵⁵

In July–August 1949, Stalin played host to the CCP delegation, headed by Liu Shaoqi. On the eve of the visit Mao announced a “lean-to-one-side” policy; that is, he proposed to Moscow a partnership between the People’s Republic of China and the USSR against the imperialist powers. Stalin paid in kind: he invited the Chinese delegation to a session of the Politburo—an unprecedented gesture, indicating a relationship of equals; he confessed that he had under-

estimated Mao and the potential of the Chinese Revolution "because our knowledge of China is too limited." He pleased the Chinese by proclaiming the CCP a revolutionary vanguard of Asia, "fulfilling a historic mission of unprecedented significance," becoming a hegemon for the millions in India, Burma, Indonesia, and the Philippines.⁵⁶

Stalin was not transformed overnight from a calculating dictator into a revolutionary romantic. Behind his apparent enthusiasm for the Chinese Revolution and its implications in Asia was a hardheaded proposal for a hierarchy of influence in the Communist universe. What Stalin said and implied in essence was: Mao and the CCP would become a leader of the Asian revolutionary process. If they chose, they could even organize an Asian Cominform, in which the USSR would participate as a half-Asian country. At the same time, the Soviet Union would consolidate its gains in Europe and the Far East, defined by the Yalta-Potsdam agreements.⁵⁷

Stalin assumed that the Chinese would recognize him as the supreme pontiff in exchange for his recognition of their role in the East. He also made clear that the Soviet Union would retain its "interests" in China (a base in Port-Arthur, railroad access to it, and exclusive rights in Manchuria and Xinjiang). These were conditions on which Stalin, for all the flexibility and new "revolutionarism," was not willing to compromise. He knew that the realities of economic and military power had cast the Soviet Union as a "big brother" to the Chinese, and that he held all the cards, including the prospect of economic assistance to Mao, Xinjiang separatism, and a "fifth column" in the Chinese leadership itself (for instance, the Communist strongman of Manchuria, Gao Gang). He wanted everything his way both as the revolutionary pontiff and as an influential emperor.

After the proclamation of the People's Republic of China in October 1949, Stalin at last agreed to receive Mao Zedong in Moscow. According to Chinese memoirs, during the first two-hour talk between the two revolutionary potentates, in the Kremlin on December 16, 1949, Mao cautiously probed Stalin to see if it would be possible to repeal the unequal Sino-Soviet treaty of 1945. He allegedly said, "I am afraid it is necessary to undergo bilateral consultations to outline certain things, [and] these things must be both beautiful and tasty." There was an awkward silence. In Mao's careful language, beautiful things stood for world revolution, and tasty things for Chinese national interests.⁵⁸

Soviet records give a very different version of the talks. Stalin got right down to business. The old Sino-Soviet treaty, he told Mao, was concluded "with the consent of America and England. With this in mind, we in our inner circle decided not to change any articles of this treaty." Otherwise, Stalin explained, the Western powers would try to change other aspects of the Yalta agreements, "regarding the Kurile islands, Southern Sakhalin, and so on." In other words, Stalin bluntly laid Soviet geopolitical priorities on the table. The Kremlin leader did not share Mao's apparent concern over a possible war (the concern that underlay his demands for Soviet aid). "There is no immediate threat to China now," he said. "Japan is still not back on its feet, and therefore not ready for war." The United States, despite its belligerent talk, "is afraid of war" more than anyone else. Nevertheless, Stalin promised to help the Chinese Communists develop their naval and aircraft forces once they accepted his conditions. "If we were friends," concluded Stalin, "peace could be ensured not only for five to ten, but even for twenty to twenty-five years." He advised the Chinese leader to satisfy his nationalist ambitions by liberating Taiwan and Tibet.⁵⁹

"During my first meeting with Stalin," Mao recalled to Yudin in 1956, "I submitted a proposal to conclude a [new] state treaty, but Stalin evaded a response . . . Subsequently, he avoided any meetings with me. I tried to call him by telephone, but was told that Stalin was not at home, and that it would be better for me to meet with Mikoyan." As we have seen, Stalin did not "evade" Mao's question at all. But the Chinese Communist leader was probably too proud to admit that during the first meeting, instead of resisting Stalin's geopolitical logic, he had concealed his irritation and played along. According to Soviet records, Mao humbly admitted that they in Beijing failed to see the connection between the Sino-Soviet treaty and "the position of America and England with regard to the Yalta Agreement." "We must act in a manner advantageous to the common cause," he said to Stalin. "It is clear that we should not change the treaty now." Mao also said that Soviet control over Port-Arthur (Lushun) and the Chinese Changchun Railroad in Manchuria "corresponds to the interests of China."⁶⁰

Mao's claim that Stalin "avoided" meeting with him becomes more doubtful in the light of this new evidence. In fact, the long waiting period after their first encounter suited Mao's interests: the Chinese leader did, after all, come to the table with the firm decision to replace

the old Sino-Soviet treaty with a new and "fair" one. So perhaps under various pretexts Mao delayed the start of working-level talks with the Soviets.

For several weeks Mao stewed in one of the government dachas near Moscow. Then Stalin suddenly took the first step. In Mao's estimate, Stalin conceded because Great Britain and India recognized the PRC in January. It is likely that, as in the case of the Marshall Plan, intelligence from London and Washington also contributed to Stalin's volte-face. The Kremlin leader might have suspected that he could play into the hands of the West and alienate his most promising ally in the Far East. One of Stalin's chief concerns about Mao in the mid-1940s had been his flirtation with American representatives in China. Stalin also knew that some other members of the top CCP leadership—such as Zhou Enlai—had been very enthusiastic about the prospect of balancing the influence of the USSR in China with the American presence there. The disposition of Great Britain to recognize the PRC must have aroused Stalin's old suspicions about Mao's loyalty. In late December 1949, an English news agency reported that Stalin had placed Mao under house arrest. On January 1, 1950, Mao responded, through the Soviet news agency TASS, by mentioning that the purpose of his visit to Moscow was to discuss the future signing of a Sino-Soviet treaty on friendship and alliance. The next day Mao sent a cable to Beijing: "The last two days saw important developments in our work here. Comrade Stalin has agreed to Comrade Zhou Enlai's coming to Moscow to sign a new Sino-Soviet treaty on friendship and alliance, as well as agreements on credit, trade, and aviation."⁶¹

On January 22, 1950, at a second meeting with Mao, Stalin "discovered" the fact that the surrender of Japan made the old Sino-Soviet treaty obsolete. When Mao spoke about the "co-prosperity" of both Communist states as the model of their future relationship, Stalin did not argue. He was apparently so forthcoming, so interested in winning Mao's trust that the Chinese leader, smelling a rat, reminded him that a new agreement between the two could touch on Soviet vital interests, sanctified by the Yalta Conference. Stalin admitted that the new Sino-Soviet treaty could cause problems between his country and the United States, but insisted that he was fully prepared to deal with the consequences.⁶²

In reality, Stalin did not give much. He then allowed himself to be

persuaded by Mao to keep Soviet troops in Port-Arthur, both as a guarantee against any resurgence of the Japanese-American threat, and as a base for training the Chinese navy. Economic assistance to the PRC remained minimal until his death. During tough talks he succeeded in imposing on Mao several secret agreements that were advantageous to him and extremely embarrassing to his new Chinese partner. One agreement prohibited foreigners from living in Manchuria and Xinjiang and encouraged joint Sino-Soviet economic concessions; another agreement, with no expiration date, allowed Soviet troops to move to Port-Arthur across Manchuria at any time, and without forewarning Chinese authorities. In an agreement on intelligence cooperation, Stalin asked Mao to set up a joint global network of espionage among Chinese living abroad. All these issues, embarrassing for Mao, were raised on Stalin's initiative. Other Politburo members (Molotov, Malenkov, Mikoyan, Bulganin, Beria, Kaganovich) played only a passive role in the talks.⁶³

Obviously, both sides regarded the signed treaties and agreements as mere formalities. The real strength of the new Sino-Soviet alliance was in Mao's personal allegiance to Stalin as the supreme Communist leader. In return for this, Stalin presented Mao with a gift that, in his opinion, any Asian satrap would have liked: he gave away the Comintern network of Chinese informers who reported to Moscow. It was another of Stalin's many betrayals of his "fifth column" around the world; subsequently, hundreds of pro-Soviet Communists in the CCP were murdered or imprisoned.⁶⁴

Stalin still did not completely trust Mao, however. His worldview was well organized, the picture clear and logical. But now Communist China had become a major new player on the international scene. There was no room for two supreme authorities in the Asian revolutionary world, and Stalin, in spite of his verbal recognition of Mao's predominance, was concerned that the Chinese leader might become another potential Tito by claiming a special place in the world Communist movement, outside the realm of Moscow's pontiff. Trying to allay this suspicion, Mao asked Stalin to send a comrade with a good knowledge of Marxist theory to Beijing to edit his works and look at the real situation in China. Stalin sent Pavel Yudin, his court philosopher, who had played an important role in the events preceding the Stalin-Tito split. Yudin later reported that he offered "more than three hundred suggestions, corrections, and all kinds of editorial and other

alterations" for the three volumes of Mao's words. Most important, Mao "fully accepted them." Yudin told Mao after Stalin's death that the leader had asked him upon his return from China "if the Chinese comrades were [true] Marxists." Yudin had said "yes," and Stalin seemed to be satisfied with that answer.⁶⁵

The Sino-Soviet treaty passed the ideological test. But the biggest test was still ahead. Stalin knew all too well that once a revolutionary leader becomes a state potentate, he acts according to geopolitical realities, national conditions, the logic of power itself. This knowledge was critical for explaining why Kim succeeded in getting Stalin to consent to the invasion of South Korea.

From Victory to Defeat

During their fateful meeting in Moscow in April 1950, Stalin agreed with Kim that, though he had opposed a "reunification" of Korea before, now it could be accomplished "in light of the changed international situation."⁶⁶ Earlier, Stalin had feared that the Americans would intervene. What, then, caused him to reassess the situation?

The new alliance with Communist China must have been the biggest cause for reassessment. From Stalin's viewpoint, this treaty was a watershed: the Yalta-Potsdam agreement on the spheres of influence had been broken. The world was now open for a redivision of spheres of influence on the basis of new, ideologically drawn alliances. As a Leninist, Stalin knew that this redivision meant global war. He said to Mao: "If we make a decision to revise treaties, we must go all the way." This phrase, in a nutshell, contained the origins of the Korean War. As the world headed for its third global confrontation, the Korean peninsula acquired new strategic meaning. Stalin worried that, should the United States rearm Japan in the future, South Korea could become a dangerous beachhead for enemy forces. Therefore, it had to be captured before Japan could get back on its feet.

Several factors made the Soviet leader believe that the United States might not defend South Korea. On August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union broke the American monopoly on atomic weapons. At about the same time, the last American troops withdrew from South Korea—a development that was closely watched from Moscow. Early in 1950 some key figures in U.S. governmental circles, particularly Secretary of State Dean Acheson, made statements that excluded South Korea from the