

The Global Cold War

*Third World Interventions and the Making
of Our Times*

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with his own role and that of the party at the center. While many anti-colonial leaders on other continents continued to see the Soviet party and state as an inspiration – as we shall see in the next chapter – Moscow’s direct involvement in Third World affairs had declined precipitously already by the mid-1930s, when Stalin began concentrating on a coming war in Europe. Until Hitler disabused him of the notion in June 1941, Stalin believed that World War II was “between two groups of capitalist countries – (poor and rich as regards colonies, raw materials, and so forth) – for the redivision of the world . . . We see nothing wrong in their having a good hard fight and weakening each other . . . Next time, we’ll urge on the other side.”³¹ The Soviet leader did expect that the colonies would attempt to rebel during a war between the imperialists, but did not think that any country outside Europe was developed enough to successfully defend such a revolution unless given direction and aid by the Soviet Union.

Defining intervention: Iran, China, Korea

The German attack in 1941 meant a complete redirection of Soviet foreign policy and of Stalin’s instructions to international Communism. The Stalinist regime was fighting for its survival against both foreign and domestic enemies, and it now needed to spend all its resources on the war against Hitler and those within the Soviet Union who saw the German attack as a welcome opportunity to rid themselves of Stalin’s terror. It also desperately needed allies, and much effort was spent on developing the relationship with Britain and the United States into a firm wartime alliance. While never imagining that such an alliance would much outlast the war, Stalin believed that the two capitalist powers needed an understanding with the Soviet Union as long as the war was still on and, probably, through the initial phase of postwar reconstruction.

Soviet planning for the postwar world began as soon as the German offensive ground to a halt in 1942. Stalin wanted to extend Soviet influence in Europe – crucially, along its western borders, but also, if possible, into Central Europe and Germany itself. But the Soviet leaders had to be very careful with predicting the precise outcome of the war. While convinced from 1942 on that Germany could not win, Stalin expected the capitalist powers to seek peace with Germany after the collapse of Hitler’s regime. Fearful that such a separate peace would leave Germany free to continue its war against the Soviet Union, Stalin needed, on the one hand, to minimize friction with his allies and thereby reduce their temptation to throw him to the wolves, while, on the other hand, also to minimize the chances for a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union in the

east, an attack that Stalin knew would mean the end of the Soviet state. Moscow therefore had to downplay any revolutionary aims to come out of the war. Communist parties in the Third World were ordered not to engage in anti-imperialist propaganda, but to support the allied war effort. In 1943 the Comintern was formally dissolved, in part as a gesture toward London and Washington, though its *apparatus* was kept intact and later, as the core of the international departments of the Soviet Communist Party, came to play a key role in developing its Third World policies.³²

Toward the end of the war – and finally convinced that his allies were not aiming for a separate peace – Stalin began choosing between the different Marxist perspectives that had been offered to him through Soviet wartime planning. His appetite increased by the Soviet victories on the Eastern Front, the Soviet leader now foresaw a security belt along its western border consisting of states whose foreign policies depended on the Soviet Union. But he also expected postwar Germany – the big prize in terms of Europe's future development – to move toward socialism and an alliance with Moscow. Through attacking a weakened Japan, the Soviet Union would secure its influence on the postwar settlements in China and Korea. Elsewhere in the colonies, the Soviet Union would also stake its claims in the redivision that would follow the war. Stalin based these optimistic perspectives on the continued competition among the main imperialist powers – Britain and the United States – in the coming battle for spoils. While the imperialists continued their rivalry, the Soviets could – through a mix of diplomacy and force – become a socialist world power.

Only gradually, between 1944 and 1947, did it become clear to Stalin that the prediction of intense imperialist rivalries for the redivision of the postwar world was wrong. Instead of powers competing, the weak European states, including Britain, sought protection of their security and the interests of world capitalism as such from the United States. To see this new, unipolar capitalist world was a hard-won realization for the Soviet leaders. It did not fit any of the Marxist maps that had been offered during the war, and it had to be explained as a temporary phenomenon, brought about by the West European capitalists' need to import American capital and technology. What was clear to Stalin was that a world dominated by the United States was much more dangerous for the Soviet Union than a system in which one could play imperialist powers off against each other. The advent of a capitalist hegemony meant that a concerted strategy for strangling the socialist state was in the making, Stalin thought.

The imposition of Communist regimes in the Eastern European countries under Soviet military control, carried out between 1945 and 1948,

was to a great extent a response to these new and more pessimistic perspectives on what the postwar world would look like. In processes that later would form important lessons for Soviet thinking about the Third World, Moscow helped plot strategies for Communist control in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, while helping to set up a separate socialist state in the part of Germany that had been occupied by Soviet troops. Stalin made it clear to the East European Communists that their political strategies could only succeed if supported by the Soviet Union and by its Red Army. Doubtful about the political qualities of the local Communist leaders, the *vozhd* argued to his inner circle that the Soviet steps had been taken more for security than for the sake of immediate social revolution – just like in Russia’s outlying provinces after 1917, the Communists and the Soviet Army were needed to hold the line *until* the local society and party were ready to embark on a true revolutionary path – patterned, of course, on that of Russia. Meanwhile, the local Communists set about constructing new states in the only way they and their Soviet advisers knew: through terror and the destruction of all independent opposition.

The change of perspectives that muddled Soviet foreign policy in Europe in the immediate postwar period also hurt its aims in the Third World. Toward a state like Turkey – where Stalin, ironically, saw no hopes for a revolution because of the dominance of Turkish bourgeois nationalism in a multiethnic state – Soviet aims were dominated by security concerns, first and foremost for control of the entrance to the Black Sea. Promising to “drive the Turks into Asia,” Stalin had asked rhetorically already in 1940: “What is Turkey? There are two million Georgians there, one and a half million Armenians, a million Kurds.”³³ In 1945 the Soviets demanded naval bases at the Straits of Hormuz and border “readjustments” in eastern Turkey, but encountering Turkish determination to defend its possessions – supported by the United States – Stalin already in the fall of 1946 decided that continued pressure on Ankara was not worth the price. The lesson, the Soviets thought, was that the Turkish nationalists were planning to create “an anti-Soviet Eastern bloc” in response to Turkey’s own “political and economic crisis and its high level of dependence on American political and military backing.”³⁴ That the Turkish crisis had been provoked by Soviet policies found no place in Moscow’s analysis.³⁵

Stalin’s postwar appetite for Soviet influence in the Third World also extended to the colonies of the defeated Axis powers, both in Africa and in Asia. The Soviet leaders thought that Tripolitania, the western half of the former Italian colony of Libya, was a particularly appropriate spot for Soviet expansion – there “we could establish a firm foothold in the

Mediterranean basin," Maksim Litvinov told the Politburo in June 1945.³⁶ According to the perspective of a world dominated by post-war imperialist rivalry, the former Commissar for Foreign Affairs told the leadership that a Soviet "presence in North or East Africa will not be opposed by the United States; on the contrary, it will rather be encouraged as an way of weakening English influence."³⁷ As the United States sided with Britain in blocking the Soviet claim, Stalin made sure that Molotov held to the rather ridiculous line at the Allied Foreign Ministers' meetings that "the Soviet government considered the future of Tripolitania as of primary importance to the Soviet people, and they must press their request to assume trusteeship of that territory."³⁸ But, again, by the end of 1946 Stalin had concluded that a direct role in North Africa was eluding his grasp because of hardening US policies. While instructing his diplomats to give up on the Soviet demand, he expected them to let the British and the Americans know that "those days when the USSR could consider itself as an insignificant state regarding all kinds of mandate territories, have passed." Justifying his retreat, he added that

we should not be more leftist than the leaders of these territories. These leaders . . . in their majority are corrupt and care not so much about the independence of their territories, as about the preservation of their privileges regarding the population of these territories. The time is not yet ripe for us to clash over the fate of these territories and to quarrel over their future with the rest of the world, including their corrupt leaders themselves.³⁹

In Iran, the Soviets' biggest neighbor to the south, the problems in Stalin's postwar Third World policy were connected to much higher stakes than in his Libyan adventure. In 1941 the Soviet Union had - in agreement with its Western allies - occupied the northern part of the country to keep it from German control, while Britain had taken over the south. Meanwhile, the British had engineered the ousting of the Iranian emperor - the shah - and replaced him with the young Crown Prince, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. Within Iran, the shattering experience of foreign occupation had thrown the door open for new political groups and ideas, which challenged not only the traditional authoritarian monarchy, but also the social and religious fundaments for the shah's power. The Communist-led People's Party, or Tudeh, had become the country's largest and best-organized political group, and the voice of a growing movement of industrial and agricultural trade unions. Leaders of the ethnic minorities - Azeris, Kurds, and Arabs - had started agitating for autonomy or outright independence. And in Qum - Iran's leading religious center - young clergymen, among them Ruhollah Khomeini, had begun calling for resistance to the foreign powers and to their agent, the shah.⁴⁰

The sense of national humiliation brought on by the great power occupation intensified political competition in Teheran. The 1943 elections to the national assembly showed strong support for liberal and leftist candidates, although the majority of representatives were still unaffiliated with any party. And although the young shah, helped by the British, managed to appoint a succession of conservative premiers over the next two years, the political initiative in the national assembly, the Majlis, gradually passed to liberal nationalists such as Ahmed Qavam and Mohammad Mossadeq.

While the Tudeh in its messages to Moscow stressed the immediate potential for a revolutionary uprising in Iran, Stalin strongly disagreed with that perspective. His main preoccupations were defensive – denying the imperialists access to the oil resources in northern Iran and securing a treaty with the leftist bourgeois nationalists in Teheran. In 1944, as the Soviet demand for an area of 216,000 sq km in the north to be set aside for joint Soviet–Iranian oil exploration enraged nationalists of all kinds in Iran, Stalin’s thinking turned to using northern ethnic separatists rather than the Iranian Communists to reach his aims.⁴¹ The *vozhd* took up a proposal made by the party leader in Soviet Azerbaijan, Mir Bagirov, instructing him to “organize a separatist movement in southern Azerbaijan and other provinces of northern Iran” and to “create a democratic party in southern Azerbaijan under the name ‘Azerbaijani Democratic Party,’ founded by reforming the Azerbaijani branch of the People’s Party of Iran and attracting all supporters of the separatist movement from all layers of society.”⁴² The Azeri nationalist Bagirov may have hoped for the unification of Soviet and Iranian Azerbaijan, but Stalin obviously intended to use the threat of Soviet support for the disintegration of Iran to pressure the Iranian bourgeoisie into striking a deal with Moscow for oil and influence.⁴³ The Teheran Communists were understandably furious. “If the enemies of the USSR had created a plan against it, they could not possibly invent anything better than what is taking place at the present time,” they wrote to Stalin in September 1945.⁴⁴

But Stalin and Bagirov were not discouraged. All through 1945 and early 1946 the Soviets continued to direct and build an autonomous regime in Iranian Azerbaijan, based in Tabriz, while warning the Tudeh against any attempts at carrying out a revolution.⁴⁵ Even in Azerbaijan and the Kurdistan areas – where the Soviets supported the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) – the reforms had to be moderate: “You have been told many times that we do not want to spark a civil war or class struggle among the Azerbaijanis. All forces . . . must be used against those who disturb us in our battle for the autonomy of Azerbaijan and

northern Kurdistan," Bagirov warned his comrades south of the border.⁴⁶ To some extent the Kurdish nationalist regime in Mahabad was more to the Soviets' liking than that of Pischevari's socialists, especially since the DPK president Qazi Mohammad – a well-read and broad-minded Islamic judge – understood that the occasional use of radical slogans would help in enlisting Soviet support and got the help of Kurds who had studied in Teheran to make up a list for official use.⁴⁷

The Iranian elite in early 1946 started realizing that there was a real danger that their country could split apart and that a military conflict with the Soviet Union may be approaching. The Majlis turned to Ahmad Qavam, a wealthy 76-year-old landowner from northern Iran with a record of political radicalism, as the new prime minister. Qavam wanted to reform politics and social affairs in Iran and defeat the challenges from the northern separatists, the Tudeh, and the royalist right wing. The new prime minister was hated by the British, with whom he had clashed on several occasions during his long political career, and was distrusted by the Americans, who viewed him as a shifty and intriguing old-style politician.⁴⁸ The Russians regarded him as a "bourgeois democrat and nationalist," who realized that he would have to seek support for his reform plans either from the United States or the Soviet Union. Qavam wanted a compromise on Soviet oil concessions, and might support "reforms" in Azerbaijan, but could not grant autonomy to the Azeris and survive in power, Moscow noted.⁴⁹

The Soviet-Iranian negotiations in Moscow in February–March 1946 showed the limitations of Stalin's approach to the Third World. Stalin and his foreign minister Molotov wanted Qavam to agree to oil concessions – together with a series of connected "rights" – and some form of self-rule for Azerbaijan. Any of these two measures would give Moscow control of northern Iran, a fact which left Molotov free to be "flexible" on the Azeri question. Some form of compromise could be found, according to Molotov, whereby real military and political power in the north would remain with the Teheran government. Pischevari "could die or become ill."⁵⁰ But a solution to the Azeri question, and a timetable for the withdrawal of Soviet forces, both depended on Qavam granting Moscow the economic concessions Stalin wanted.⁵¹

Qavam would not accept Stalin's and Molotov's Cold War logic. He suggested a compromise in which he, in return for a Soviet commitment to withdraw, would propose to the Majlis limited self-rule for the Azeris and comprehensive talks with Moscow on political and economic relations. But Molotov was not impressed. "The Soviet government wants to expedite the oil issue," the foreign minister said, and if Qavam was in no position to grant oil concessions, the Soviets would discuss the issue with the

government in Tabriz.⁵² Then Molotov presented his own proposals: a limited self-rule scheme for Azerbaijan – which clearly signaled Moscow’s disinterest in the overall fate of Pishvari’s regime – and the immediate start of negotiations between Iran and the Soviet Union on a concession in northern Iran for a joint oil exploration and production company, 51 percent of which was to be owned by Moscow. “Soviet troops,” Molotov wrote, “will be completely withdrawn from Iran as soon as the Iranian government liquidates all enemy and discriminating measures in its relations with the Soviet Union, establishes peaceful conditions in northern Iran, and introduces a friendly policy toward the Soviet Union.”⁵³

Encountering such demands, and such a negotiating strategy, there is little wonder why Qavam turned to the Americans for support and to crafty diplomacy for time. As US pressure increased for the Soviets to withdraw the Red Army from northern Iran, the Iranian prime minister promised Stalin a treaty on oil concessions to ease the Soviet departure. He also took three members of the Tudeh into his new government after the last of the Soviet soldiers had left at the end of May 1946. Himself confronted by the West and still believing that Qavam and the bourgeois nationalists would have to come to an agreement with Moscow to stave off Western pressure, Stalin decided to drop the Azerbaijani separatist regime. The Tabriz leadership was understandably dejected. As Pishvari told Bagirov during a secret meeting in April 1946:

Having turned the Shah’s government against ourselves, we cannot go on our knees before them . . . No matter how much I might want to, I just cannot do it. I am prepared to die on the fields of battle in the interest of the people, but I can’t sell them out . . . With your help, we democrats and leaders followed a path in violation of Iran’s constitution, breaking it, discrediting it . . . After all that, how can Qavam ever forgive us? Even in the middle of our work . . . there were moments when I had my doubts about you, and whether you would help us to the end . . . and now, all the more, I don’t believe you at all. Comrades, I repeat, I don’t believe you anymore.⁵⁴

Stalin, however, would not let the Azerbaijani leaders fall without giving them a final lecture on Marxism. In May 1946 he wrote to Pishvari:

You here want to emulate Lenin [by calling for revolution]. This is very good and laudable . . . However, the situation in Iran today is totally different. There is no profound revolutionary crisis in Iran. There are few workers in Iran and they are poorly organized . . . We decided to withdraw troops from Iran and China, in order to ~~use~~ this tool from the hands of the British and Americans, to unleash the liberation movement in the colonies and thereby render our liberationist policy more justified and efficient.

Qavam, Stalin stressed, remained a progressive bourgeois. The Communist aim, in Tabriz, Teheran, and Moscow, should be to “wrench concessions

from Qavam, give him support, isolate the Anglophiles.”⁵⁵ But by the end of 1946 the shah’s armies had retaken all the northern areas, where they wreaked a terrible revenge on the Azeri and Kurdish separatists. Conveniently for Stalin, Jafar Pishevari died in a car crash after having fled to the Soviet Union in 1947. With both the Azeri regime and the Red Army gone, the Majlis saw no reason to ratify the Soviet oil treaty. The Communists were soon forced out of the Teheran government, and Ahmad Qavam was dismissed by the shah in December 1947. Two years later, the Tudeh was banned and its leaders driven underground or into exile, as the shah drew increasingly close to the United States.

Stalin’s actions in Iran and the dogmatic view of social and political development on which they were based helped defeat the Iranian Left. Although it would have been suicidal to openly question the *vozhd*’s views within the Soviet party, we know that some leaders in Moscow and in Baku were skeptical at least as to the outcome of Stalin’s policies and wondered if the Soviet Union could not do better in its competition with the imperialist powers. But for the vast majority of Soviet officials the Iranian debacle was a result of the West’s increasingly aggressive policies against the Soviet Union and against socialism. “In all of the Near and Middle East one can observe an intensification of American activity,” one intelligence summary noted, “from which rises the smell of oil, military sea- and air-bases, the preparation of an aggressive war. Behind the talks on dollar loans, ‘emergency help,’ ‘control activities’ of military and civilian personnel is hidden the . . . increased penetration of American imperialism into these countries with the goal of turning them into its military-strategic launching pads.”⁵⁶

China – Stalin’s old nemesis – was the only major Third World state contiguous to the Soviet Union in which the *vozhd* did not manage to wreck the perspectives of the local Communists on behalf of Soviet security. The main reason why the Chinese Communists succeeded where the Iranians failed was Mao Zedong’s determination not to risk his own party’s future by following each and every instruction he might be getting from Moscow. While believing in Stalin’s strategic genius and in the need to emulate the Soviet experience in China in a concrete form, Mao chose to ignore the Boss’s orders to make peace with the Chinese Nationalists, Chiang Kai-shek’s Guomindang (GMD), after Chiang had attacked the Communist troops in 1946. As in Iran, Stalin had tried to negotiate a treaty with the Nationalist government in China after the end of World War II, intending to exclude imperialist influence and secure Soviet control of the border areas, but – as in Iran – the government had turned to the United States to successfully resist Soviet pressure. However, unlike the governments of Turkey or Iran, Chiang’s regime

in China had been significantly weakened by the war and – to make matters worse for itself – began taking on all of its domestic enemies at once in the postwar period. As a result, the Communists not only survived the initial military onslaught, but were gradually able to turn the situation on the battlefield to their advantage. By 1948, as it became clear that the GMD could not defeat Mao's forces and that the Americans were unwilling to bail Chiang's government out of its economic and military predicament, Stalin began a significant program of support for the Chinese Communists. As the GMD armies broke down, Communism finally seemed set to make a major advance in the Third World.

But even in victory Stalin's dogmatic adherence to the Marxist patterns of development shone through. In 1948–49, as Mao's forces were preparing their final push to the south, Stalin warned the Chinese Communists not to put socialism on the agenda:

some representatives of [opposition] parties will have to be incorporated in the Chinese people's democratic government, and the government as such [will have] to be proclaimed as coalition . . . It should be kept in mind that after the victory of the people's liberation armies of China – at least, in a postvictory period for which the duration is difficult to define now – the Chinese government, in terms of its policy, will be a national revolutionary-democratic government, rather than a Communist one. This means that nationalization of all lands and cancellation of the private ownership of land, confiscation of properties from the whole, major and petty, industrial and trade bourgeoisie, confiscation of properties from not only large, but middle and small landowners, who live together with their hired labor, cannot be effected yet.⁵⁷

Even during the victorious Mao Zedong's visit to Moscow in 1949–50 Stalin persisted in treating the Chinese Communists as representatives of a "national revolutionary-democratic government, rather than a Communist one." Uncertain about the long-term viability of a Communist leadership in Beijing, Stalin aimed at getting a treaty that was conducive to Soviet security, rather than an alliance between two Communist-led states. It took concerted and courageous intervention by his key advisers to get him to offer the Chinese something that would give them the recognition they craved as revolutionaries from the head of the world Communist movement. But even after the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance was signed, on 14 February 1950, Stalin kept his doubts about the authenticity of the Chinese Communist leaders. If they were genuine Communists, the *vozhd* explained to his coterie, they would not last long in power in a country at China's level of development. If the Beijing government seemed secure, that in itself was evidence of its non-Marxist character.

Stalin's last Third World adventure, the Korean War, testified to how far down the road toward theoretical tautologies the Boss came during his final years. Seeing socialism in only the northern part of Korea as unviable in the long run, in spite of the new Democratic People's Republic of Korea under Kim Il Sung being contiguous to the Soviet Union and receiving aid from it, Stalin by early 1950 claimed that "the South was determined to launch an attack on the North sooner or later and it was important to forestall this aggression." In giving Kim the go-ahead to attack the US-supported regime in South Korea, Stalin also pointed to "the significant strengthening of the socialist camp in the east: the victory of the Chinese revolution, the signing of an alliance between the USSR and the PRC, and the USSR's acquisition of an atomic bomb," as well as "the obvious weakness of the reactionary camp: the shameful defeat of America's intervention into Chinese affairs, Western troubles in Southeast Asia, and the inability of the South Korean regime and its American masters to improve the social, economic, and political situation in South Korea." For Stalin, indirect support of Kim's war would also be a way of getting back at "the dishonest, perfidious, and arrogant behavior of the United States in Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East, and especially its decision to form NATO."⁵⁸

It was pessimism and not optimism about the future of the Korean revolution that led Stalin to accept Kim's plan for reunification by military force. As many of the Communists who were in charge of Soviet foreign policy realized, the Korean War showed that Stalin had left behind any hope that social processes in the Third World by themselves would lead toward socialism. Even under the best of geographical and political circumstances – such as in North Korea – the primary objective of Third World Communism should be to serve Soviet purposes in the global Cold War, because the defined circumstances under which they themselves could carry out a successful social transformation were so narrow as to be almost nonexistent. It was as if Stalin – having started the climb toward socialism in one country – was deliberately kicking away the ladder for others to follow.

The Soviet rediscovery of the Third World (1955–60)

Stalin's last known in-depth comments on Third World problems are in his secret instructions to the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) from January 1951. After having criticized the Indonesian party for their "leftism" both during the failed 1948 rebellion against the nationalist independence movement under Sukarno and during the subsequent gradual reestablishment of the party under Chinese tutelage, the Boss

went on to show the impossibility of an Indonesian Communist revolution. Even building on the Chinese model would not work:

they [the Chinese] at last found a good way out, when they moved to Manchuria and found a solid rear [base] in the friendly Soviet state. Characteristically, only after [the] Chinese comrades got a solid rear base in Manchuria and after they began leaning against the USSR as against their own rear, the enemy lost the chance to encircle them and the Chinese Communists found an opportunity to wage a planned offensive against Chiang Kai-shek's army from north to south. Can we suppose that the Indonesian comrades, after they have gained a guerrilla-liberated area, will have the opportunity, as the Chinese comrades did, to lean against frontiers as against their own rear [base] and thus deprive the enemy of the opportunity to encircle them? No, we cannot say that, as Indonesia represents a group of islands encircled by seas, and the Indonesian comrades could not lean anywhere.⁵⁹

To the Soviet Communists who took over after Stalin's death in March 1953, the Boss's Third World policy seemed self-defeating. In spite of serious disagreements as to the future of socialism, they all agreed to end armed interventionism, such as in Korea, and to emphasize the government-to-government links that could be built not only with self-declared socialist regimes – such as China – but also with radical bourgeois regimes (“Jacobins,” in Comintern terms), such as Sukarno's Indonesia, Nasser's Egypt, or Nehru's India. The new party leader, Nikita Khrushchev, underlined the new policies by making a trip to Beijing in 1954, his first major visit abroad, and by traveling to India, Burma, and Afghanistan the following year. During his trip to South Asia, the new first secretary of the Soviet Communist Party (renamed the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, CPSU, in 1952) stressed Soviet willingness to cooperate with the “national development” of nonsocialist countries in the Third World both in economic and military terms. The common enemy, the Soviets stated, was colonialism and imperialism on a worldwide scale.

For Khrushchev – an intelligent but unschooled peasants' son who had made his way up Stalinism's slippery slope by boundless enthusiasm for hard work – visiting India was just the beginning of a much broader campaign for gaining influence in the Third World. As he solidified his grip on power within the Soviet state, Khrushchev attacked Stalin's policies toward Asia, Africa, and Latin America in two different directions. On the one hand, the *vozhd* had neglected the Third World, by focusing too narrowly on those national-bourgeois movements that by themselves had sought friendship and cooperation with the Soviet Union, and by not attempting “actively” to forge links with others. On the other hand, Stalin had failed to see that transitions to socialism could take many different forms, and that more assistance to Third World workers' parties was needed, even if some of these parties had no chance of gaining power

on their own in the short run. Khrushchev's big fear was that Stalin's policies had nearly made the Soviet Union miss the train in the new historical departure away from colonial empires and toward the establishment of independent states. In 1956, at the 20th Congress of the CPSU, Khrushchev – after sensationally condemning Stalin's general behavior as “vile,” “monstrous,” and “terrorist” – declared that

The new period that Lenin predicted in world history when peoples of the East take an active part in settling the destinies of the whole world and become a new, powerful factor in international relations, has arrived ... In order to create an independent national economy and to raise the living standards of their peoples, these countries, though not part of the world socialist system, can benefit by its achievements. They now have no need to go begging to their former oppressors for modern equipment. They can obtain such equipment in the socialist countries.⁶⁰

Typically for Khrushchev's regime, the new leadership – while condemning Stalin – were unable to move away from much of the dogmatism that the Boss had bequeathed to Soviet ideology. In its Third World policies, this meant that the narrow thinking about “stages of development” was still in place, as was the Soviet-centrism of Moscow's perceptions of the outside world. What did improve was Soviet knowledge about the Third World, through a full-scale revamping of the institutions that provided the information upon which the leadership could act. In its self-criticism after the twentieth party congress, the Academy of Sciences' Institute of Oriental Studies declared that its work had “been greatly harmed by a failure to understand the nature and the depth of the contradictions existing between the forces of imperialism and internal reaction, on the one hand, and those of national progress in the nonsocialist Eastern countries on the other.”⁶¹ The institute's work was expanded, and new institutes for the study of Africa and Latin America were set up in 1960 and 1961 respectively. The Soviet intelligence services were reorganized, and both the Committee for State Security (Komitet gosudarstvennoi bezopasnosti, KGB) and military intelligence (Glavnoie razvedivatelnoie upravleniie, GRU – Chief Intelligence Directorate of the General Staff) were given specific geographical briefs relating to Third World information gathering. Most important of all, the Central Committee reorganized its international work, setting up two new departments, the International Department (Mezhdunarodnyi otdel, MO) and the Department for Relations with Communist and Workers' Parties of Socialist Countries (later called the International Liaison Department). Both departments were under the control of Comintern veteran Boris Ponomarev, who was also made a member of the Secretariat.⁶²

Of all the big tasks Khrushchev foresaw for the Soviet Union in the Third World, building the alliance with China was by far the most important. Not just the First Secretary, but the whole party leadership was convinced that the socialist transformation of the most populous country on earth was a task that the Soviet Union had to engage in – it not only confirmed their Marxist worldview, but also highlighted the universal centrality of the Soviet experience in building socialism. The assistance program carried out under the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty was the Soviet Union's Marshall Plan – already in May 1953, two months after Stalin's death, Moscow agreed to increase aid to China sevenfold over two years, and the total cost of the program up to 1960 was about twenty billion roubles in export prices, something which the historian Sergei Goncharenko estimates as equaling 7 percent of Soviet national income for the period. It was a massive attempt at stamping Soviet socialism on China – in every department of every ministry, in every large factory, in every city, army, or university there were Soviet advisers, specialists, or experts who worked with the Chinese to “modernize” their country and move their society toward socialism. Their achievements changed the Chinese economy forever and – unbeknown to the Soviet experts or their Chinese comrades – were to lay the foundation for the Chinese capitalist revolution of the 1980s and 1990s.⁶³

Out of the increasingly close cooperation, Khrushchev saw developing a future international socialist community – with the Soviet Union at the center – that replicated many of the functions the capitalist world economy had (*sans* capitalism, of course). International distribution networks would supply standardized and unified production lines from Berlin to Shanghai, research and training would be shared between socialist countries, as would innovations in technology, defense, and planning, and ideological questions would be decided at international congresses. In the Chinese case, however, the problem with increasing integration was that the basic acceptance of the Soviet model – which underpinned all of Khrushchev's project – was beginning to be questioned by the late 1950s. Mao Zedong wanted “more, faster, better, and cheaper” socialism, and by designing “The Great Leap Forward” in 1958 he broke decisively with all Soviet advice about caution and stages. At the same time, through its conflict with India and its criticism of Soviet *détente* with the United States, China broke with the key concept of Moscow setting the tune for the “socialist camp” in international affairs.

By 1959 the Sino-Soviet relationship was in crisis. The personal diplomacy that Khrushchev engaged in by visiting Beijing had little effect. Mao Zedong saw the Soviet slogan of “peaceful competition” with the West as class treason, and Moscow's alliance policies with nonsocialist Third

World regimes as directed against China. Khrushchev tried to defend his new line as tactics – “Nehru,” he said, “may go over to the United States. He is among our fellow travelers who go with us when it is to their advantage. When we delivered assistance to Nasser, we knew that he might turn against us. Had we not given him this credit, Nasser would have ended up in America’s embrace.”⁶⁴ But Mao could not be mollified, and in the summer of 1960 Khrushchev reacted to the steady pinpricks of criticism coming from Beijing by abruptly withdrawing most Soviet experts from the PRC. The First Secretary and those working with him failed to understand that for Mao Zedong the real issue was the future of the Chinese revolution – by sticking too closely to the advice the Soviets gave, the rapid advance toward socialism that the Chairman envisaged would simply not be possible. By 1962 Khrushchev had condemned the Chinese as careless, ungrateful, and chauvinist peasants, and although it took up to 1965 for the final remnants of the alliance to vanish, the increasingly heated public polemics between Moscow and Beijing convinced the Soviets of the future problems the confrontation with Chinese socialism would pose.

The difficulties with China presented the Soviet leaders not only with new security issues and with increased competition for influence in the Third World. It also posed a formidable challenge to Soviet foreign policy ideology. The relationship to China had been lauded as the ultimate proof of socialism’s applicability to the Third World, and, up to 1958, Soviet experts had held the People’s Republic of China up to the North Vietnamese and the North Koreans as the near perfect application of Marxist political theory in “oriental” countries. With the alliance in tatters, Moscow had to explain what had gone wrong and to stake out the road ahead. On the one hand, the wrecking of the supposedly irreversible gains made in China was explained by the wrongheadedness of the “Mao-clique,” which had come to power due to the Chinese party’s lack of “proletarian experience.” On the other hand, the combination of immense disappointment and no proper cause for failure led many Soviet leaders to racist explanations: the Soviet effort in China was failing because of the inborn deviousness and selfishness of the Chinese.

Just like the United States in the 1950s, the Soviet Union in the 1960s made no attempts to learn from the its failure in China. On the contrary, the former alliance became a taboo area of Soviet foreign policy, rarely touched on in official or unofficial discourse. The many advisers who had served in China, and whose experience could have benefited future Soviet Third World policy, instead became the “lost generation” in foreign affairs, rarely allowed near international relations in any form again. Those who were put in charge of what Khrushchev envisaged to be a

full-scale attempt at competing with the United States in the newly liberated countries in Africa and Asia were mostly young people with very little experience abroad. Their main frame of reference was *not* China but the successes the Soviet Union had had in technology and production in the 1950s. It was Soviet modernity that would win people for Communism abroad, as socialism – freed from Stalin’s shackles – showed its full productive potential. Two key projects that would inspire Soviet assistance to the Third World were the Virgin Lands campaign and the space program. The attempt at bringing into cultivation 32 million acres of previously uncultivated land in Kazakhstan and southwestern Siberia, begun in 1954, was a flagship of the new and intensive growth phase that the Soviet Union claimed to have entered. Using massive amounts of irrigation and chemical fertilizers to develop the barren plain, Khrushchev’s leadership assumed that they had devised a new way of intensifying food production. The launch of the first space vessel, the Sputnik, in 1957 and the first manned space flight by Iurii Gagarin in 1961 convinced most Soviets that they had the upper hand over the West in technology and science. Together, Soviet know-how in agriculture and industry would revolutionize production at home and make it possible for countries moving toward socialism to move faster and with fewer concessions to the West. In his speech to the United Nations in 1960, Khrushchev saw the joining of national liberation in the Third World with socialism’s productive potential as symbolizing the future:

Everyone knows that the economies of the colonies . . . are at present subordinated to the mercenary interests of foreign monopolies, and the industrialization of these countries is being deliberately impeded. Imagine that the situation has changed and that these countries and territories, having become independent, are in a position to make ample use of their rich natural resources and to proceed with their industrialization, and that a better life has begun for their peoples. This would . . . no doubt have a beneficial effect, not only on the economic development of the countries of the East but also on the economies of the industrially developed countries of the West.⁶⁵

To his audiences within the party and the international Communist movement, such as at a closed meeting on political theory and propaganda in January 1961, Khrushchev stressed the same idea in more ideological terms:

Bourgeois and revisionist politicians claim that the national-liberation movement develops independently of the struggle for socialism waged by the working class, independently of the support of the socialist countries, and that the colonialists themselves bestow freedom on the peoples of the former colonies. The purpose of these fabrications is to isolate the newly independent states from the socialist

camp and to try to prove that they should assume the role of a "third force" in the international arena instead of opposing imperialism. Needless to say, this is sheer humbug. It is a historical fact that prior to the victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution the peoples failed in their attempts to break the chains of colonialism. History proves that until socialism triumphed in at least a part of the world there could be no question of destroying colonialism.⁶⁶

By the early 1960s Soviet ideology had already reached a stage where the competition for influence in the Third World was an essential part of the existence of socialism. As in the United States, the Soviet elites saw their mission as part of a world-historical progression toward a given goal. Their view of their own role in that process was conditioned not just by Marxist-Leninist political theory but also by Russian exceptionalism and by the experiences of the Soviet leadership since 1917. In spite of setbacks and retreats the Soviet elite firmly believed that socialism would replace capitalism as the main international system within a generation. Stalin's successors held that the transition could be managed without global war only if the imperialists became convinced that they could not successfully intervene against social revolution outside their own borders. The Soviet Union's role was to help make the world safe for revolution and thereby to assist in the progress of humankind.