Eastern Advisory Commission. Although falling short of Stalin’s demands, such a forum could provide a promising opening for future encroachments. For its part, the Soviet side agreed to a broader composition of a future peace conference than it originally wanted and to the creation of a UN Commission on Atomic Energy. But the Kremlin saw the overall outcome of the conference as favorable. It almost seemed that interallied relationships were getting back on their wartime track, an encouraging conclusion as favorable to the conference as favorable. It almost seemed that interallied relationships were getting back on their wartime track, an encouraging conclusion as favorable to the conference as favorable. It almost seemed that interallied relationships were getting back on their wartime track, an encouraging conclusion as favorable to the conference as favorable. 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many in the seats of authority who hurl themselves into infantile ecstasy when hearing praises from the Churchills, the Trumans, the Byrneses, and conversely, who lose heart after unfavorable references from these misters. In my view these are dangerous attitudes, since they spawn in our ranks servility before foreign figures. Against this servility before foreigners we must fight tooth and nail.”

Stalin’s response to Molotov’s decision about censorship was much harsher. He orchestrated a humiliating harassment of Molotov before the Politburo “troika” of Georgy Malenkov, Beria, and Anastas Mikoyan, during which he accused him of “placating” Western circles. Though Molotov was ultimately pardoned, he and his colleagues must have learned the lesson well: From now on, the premium was on anti-Western toughness. This small episode is a vivid illustration of how Stalin’s personal urge to tighten control over his immediate circle dovetailed with his larger strategy concerning the country’s economic mobilization.

Curiously, this dressing-down also mirrored Truman’s famous reprimand of Byrnes after the latter’s return from Moscow. “I am tired of babying the Soviets,” Truman recalled telling Byrnes. However different in style and character, the two leaders had essentially the same aim: to shake their subordinates into a tougher line toward the former ally now becoming an enemy. For Stalin, the scolding of Molotov was a sort of dress rehearsal for his imminent public anti-Western campaign, a campaign for which another speech by Churchill provided a convenient target.

Churchill’s famous “iron curtain” speech at Fulton, Missouri, on March 5, 1946, long considered in the Soviet Union to be a formal declaration of the Cold War, became both a challenge and an opportunity for Stalin. It not only confirmed his view of Churchill as the main instigator of anti-Soviet policies, but it also increased his suspicions about Truman, who after all presided over Churchill’s powerful performance. The United States was, it seemed, at best conniving and at worst plotting with Churchill in this new anti-Soviet offensive.

By then, Stalin had still more indications of a toughening U.S. line: Byrnes’s speech in New York on February 28; the support that both the United States and Britain gave the Iranian government’s protest in the UN Security Council against Soviet actions; and the “long telegram” by George F. Kennan, picked up by Soviet intelligence in Washington, where it was widely circulated. Coupled with Churchill’s open call for British–American military cooperation, it was more than enough to renew fears about the dangers of an American bloc against the U.S.S.R., which Kremlin leaders still hoped that “imperialist contradictions” would prevent. But Stalin fully understood the formidable strategic consequences that a combination of American economic and atomic power with the British empire’s global military infrastructure would have. In their copies of the Fulton speech, both Stalin and Molotov underlined precisely those passages in which Churchill described the sinews of British–American power.

But if a challenge, Fulton was also an opportunity. Because of Churchill’s well-known anti-Soviet record, which went back to the very beginning of the Soviet state, he was an ideal reminder of the external threat still emanating from the West that Stalin needed to rally his people around him. That is why, instead of silencing the “iron curtain” speech, which his control over the media would have allowed, Stalin chose to publicize and then criticize it in the Soviet press. After several critical reviews had appeared in the press, Stalin published his own answer to Churchill in Pravda on March 14. Kremlin records show that, as he usually did in important cases, Stalin wrote the “interview” entirely by himself (including the questions by a mythical “correspondent”). In this piece, Stalin rather skillfully depicted Churchill as a war-monger and an anachronistic Tory running against the tide of history. But Stalin did not issue a wholesale call to arms against this anti-Soviet crusade; the threat had to be serious enough to energize his people into needed vigilance, but manageable enough not to scare them into panic. So he ended the “interview” with optimistic assurances about the inevitable defeat of Churchill and “his friends” should they try to attack the Soviet Union and its allies.

Stalin’s rejoinder set the tone for a new line of Soviet propaganda that was increasingly anti-Western and that began to emphasize the need to mobilize against “aggressive tendencies” in the West. As international relations became tenser, it seemed logical to tighten the domestic ideological screws. In April 1946, Stalin’s new favorite, the Politburo member Andrei Zhdanov, following instructions from his boss, began to direct the party machinery toward “curing ills on the ideological front” and rejecting the notion that “people should have a rest after the war.”

At the same time, Stalin carefully avoided linking Churchill’s line with official U.S. policy. Giving almost friendly advice to the new American ambassador in Moscow, Walter Bedell Smith, he urged the United States not to pull anti-Soviet chestnuts out of the fire for Britain. Stalin still hoped to prevent a looming British–American alliance and to play the two imperialist countries off against each other. But his own actions undercut such hopes and tended to produce the opposite effect.
IRAN AND TURKEY

Two major crises in 1946, those over Iran and Turkey, worsened Soviet-American relations. Soviet interests in Iran were twofold: oil and security. Soviet policy-planners viewed this neighboring country as a potential launching pad for attack against the U.S.S.R. and its oil deposits around Baku; they were determined to use the wartime occupation of northern Iran and the local communist (Tudeh) party as basic tools to serve their interests after the war. And they worried about American intentions. Gromyko wrote an assessment in mid-1944: “U.S. aspirations to increase its influence in the Near and Middle East, particularly in Iran, would not be in the interest of the U.S.S.R.”

On July 6, 1945, the Politburo decided to organize a separation movement in South Azerbaijan and other provinces of northern Iran, making use of ethnic Azeri and Kurds in those areas. In that part of Iran under Soviet occupation, the Tudeh party was reorganized into the Azerbaijan Democratic party (ADP), a broader, less visibly pro-Soviet organization led by communists. It is still not clear what Stalin was really after in this scheme: nominal independence of northern Iran under an ADP government (which would solve both security and oil problems); regional autonomy within the Iranian state (the separatists’ proclaimed goal); or a national liberation movement that he could control and use as leverage to wrest oil concessions from Teheran. For its part, Teheran, encouraged by the U.S. embassy, refused to set up a joint oil company with a predominant Soviet interest before the complete withdrawal of all occupation forces.

In order to increase pressure on Iran and to gain time, Stalin delayed withdrawal of Soviet troops in violation of earlier agreements. When the Iranian government appealed to the UN Security Council, the Soviet delegation found itself isolated. In the face of opposition at the United Nations, especially by Britain and the United States, Stalin decided to accept a compromise offered by the Iranian prime minister during his visit to Moscow in February and March 1946. In return for the withdrawal of Soviet forces, Iran would sign an oil concession. The catch was that the concession would have to be approved by the Iranian parliament, the Majlis, after new elections. Stalin reluctantly delivered his part of the deal and did not intervene when later in the year Iranian forces brutally suppressed ADP separatists. In the end, the Soviet Union was double-crossed, for after a lot of foot-dragging, the Majlis rejected the oil concession in February 1947.

The crisis over Turkey developed along similar lines. In 1946, Stalin stepped up his war of nerves against Turkey by backing old territorial claims of Armenian and Georgian nationalists. Surviving circumstantial evidence suggests that he also built up a strong military presence along the Turkish border for the purpose of either blackmail or invasion. The latter was a gamble that even the chastised Molotov found too dangerous; he tried to talk his boss out of the build-up and later admitted that Stalin’s demands were “an ill-timed, unrealistic thing.” But according to Molotov, Stalin insisted: “Go ahead; push for joint ownership [of military bases on the straits].”

Coming on the heels of the Iranian crisis, Stalin’s campaign against Turkey met with firm resolve on the part of the U.S. and British governments, which began military preparations to defend the Turks. Soviet intelligence was bound to pick up those signals, which probably was the main reason why Stalin backed off in the fall of 1946. Molotov later recalled his chief: “It was good that we retreated in time, for otherwise it would have led to a joint aggression against us.”

Stalin’s conduct in Iran and Turkey revealed the same pattern: brutal pressure, reliance on force and covert methods, blackmail, and a last-minute retreat when faced with strong opposition or a risk of war. In both cases he ended up with the worst of both worlds. He failed to get what he wanted, and he got what he feared and tried to avoid: an increasingly united British-American bloc and the dissipation of Soviet influence in the region, a void that the United States rushed to fill. An even more lasting negative effect of Soviet actions in 1946 was crystallization of the belief in the West (at both elite and public levels) that the Soviet Union was bent on expansion and that it could be stopped only by preponderant force.

Was Stalin aware of the connection between his own actions and a growing resistance to them? Probably not. Much like his counterparts in the West, he tended to think that his rivals’ basic motives were constant, thus not contingent on the other side’s actions. Besides, he viewed rivalry as a normal part of a geopolitical “great game,” a game in which one knocks at various doors, winning here and losing there without interrupting “business as usual,” a game that he played much more cynically and eagerly than did leaders of the Western democracies.

Stalin’s ability to separate his unsuccessful regional probing from other issues was evident in bargaining with his allies over the peace settlement in Europe. At sessions of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Paris and New York, as well as at the Paris Peace Conference, he gained what he considered to be essential and gave way in other matters. Hard-headed Soviet diplomacy was able to achieve its basic aim: peace treaties with former German satellites that helped to legitimate Soviet dominance in eastern Europe. Concerning
Another sensitive issue, the Kremlin circumvented Western insistence on the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Romania and Hungary by insisting that those troops were needed to secure communications lines to the Soviet zone in Austria, with which there was not yet a peace treaty (largely because of Soviet obduracy).

Stalin clearly did not want a major rupture with the Western powers, however, and on matters that he considered peripheral, such as the amount of reparations from Italy and the status of Trieste, he compromised. As he cabled Molotov (in Paris) on June 23, 1946, “I think we must not delay the conference because of the issue of Trieste.” Accordingly, he permitted Trieste to be placed under international control instead of being incorporated into Yugoslavia, as the government of that communist-led country demanded—this despite Molotov’s concern that the United States and Britain “consider Trieste as a beachhead . . . in the Balkans.” In the face of firm opposition, Stalin also dropped his Mediterranean project, explaining in a cable to Molotov, who needed little consolation about this particular decision, that “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.”

The key element of a comprehensive peace settlement—the fate of Germany—remained unresolved and became increasingly contentious. The Kremlin saw the U.S. decision to stop payment of reparations from the American zone to the Soviet one as a clear violation of agreements made at Potsdam and an indication that the United States was in Germany for the long haul. Soviet leaders were disturbed by clear signals that the United States and Britain intended to strengthen the economy in their zones of occupation at the expense of the Soviet zone, most notably by Secretary Byrnes’s famous speech in Stuttgart in September 1946 about rebuilding the German economy and by the beginning stages of the consolidation of the American and British zones. Such steps would make it difficult, if not impossible, to create a united and pro-Soviet Germany.

That task was further complicated by internal contradictions in Soviet occupation policy. Heavy reparations, massive industrial dismantling, and brutal behavior by Red Army personnel tarnished the Soviet image and model in the eyes of most Germans. Yet Stahn was not ready to give up his maximum goal. Through the early part of 1947, he continued to instruct communists in the Soviet zone to proceed with “winning over” people in the western zones by promises from the new Socialist Unity party and by appeals to German national-patriotic sentiments. Talking in January 1947 with Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl, leaders of the new party, Stahn said “If we succeed in completing this first stage, that will be well and good. If we don’t, we’ll accept the consolidation of German administration in the Soviet zone.” In other words, a separate East German state remained an option, but Stahn hoped for more and was unwilling to assume responsibility for solidifying Germany’s division.

In eastern Europe, Soviet officials continued to push the development of “people’s democracies.” The policy called for breaking up large landed estates, nationalizing banking and industry, and strengthening local communist organizations—all while preserving a facade of democratic institutions and coalition governments. While “building socialism” remained Stalin’s ultimate intention for the affected countries, that stage was presumably to be reached by varying “national ways” short of violent revolution and massive repression. Accordingly, Stalin even restrained his clients in Poland from suppressing their bourgeois opponents and in May 1946 warned Polish leaders not to alienate that country’s Roman Catholic Church. The Polish road to socialism, he insisted, was to develop along democratic lines without resort to a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The Kremlin also continued to tolerate noncommunist leaders in Hungary and Czechoslovakia with the proviso that they loyally follow Moscow’s lead in foreign policy. As long as governments in eastern Europe followed generally pro-Soviet policies, and as long as there were no serious attempts by the United States or Britain to undermine his influence, Stahn was confident that he could manage this vital security zone without blatantly violating the Yalta principles regarding “liberated” Europe.

Finland, which admittedly lay outside the main approaches to Russia, provided an unusual case of Soviet toleration. During a previously unreported meeting with a Finnish delegation in October 1945, Stalin referred to Soviet policy toward Finland as “generosity by calculation.” He added, “When we treat neighboring countries well, they will respond in kind.”

Behind the lingering degree of moderation in Soviet policy, however, a radical shift in the Soviet leadership’s perception of the changing world scene was taking place. The United States was quickly replacing old European rivals as Russia’s principal adversary, one bent on restoring traditional enemies such as Germany and Japan, encircling the Soviet Union with military bases around its periphery, and threatening the U.S.S.R. with its atomic monopoly. That the Baruch Plan, proposed by the United States in July 1946, would put the Soviet atomic program under strict international control immune
from a veto by the UN Security Council, while preserving America’s atomic lead, only confirmed these suspicions.

Newly declassified Soviet documents give many illustrations of this new perception among the Soviet hierarchy. Litvinov concluded one report about U.S. policy with the cautious warning that “the establishment of American control over the Iranian and Chinese armies as well as the acquisition of numerous naval and air-force bases in various parts of the world may be regarded as a potential interference.” (Molotov found this statement entirely too tentative and crossed out the word “potential.”) And during a closed discussion of Soviet foreign propaganda at a meeting of the CPSU’s Central Committee in July 1946, high functionaries spoke earnestly about “a full-scale propaganda offensive” of “so-called allies” aimed at “mobilizing the western public for a future war against the U.S.S.R.” Interestingly enough, the Soviet side felt itself to be on the defensive in this mounting ideological conflict. In summarizing the discussion, Alexei Kuznetsov, a secretary of the committee, said: “We have no real propaganda. . . . We are being pushed out from everywhere; they are advancing while we are on defensive, and even this defense we conduct badly, unskillfully.”

A SPIRIT OF CONFRONTATION

Driven by events and by Stalin, Soviet officials increasingly emphasized the spirit of confrontation in their internal assessments of their former allies. They wrote about the “aggressive intentions of the atomic powers” and the “militarization of U.S. foreign policy.” The standard doctrinal explanation for this shift in America’s image and behavior emphasized the changing “correlation of political forces” within the United States, where “the Roosevelt trend” was being overpowered by a “new American reactionary trend, particularly after the Moscow conference of the three ministers,” as Molotov reported to this staff after the Paris Peace Conference.

Perhaps the best example of this reassessment of former allies was the Novikov telegram, a long analytical report on U.S. foreign policy compiled on Molotov’s instruction in the fall of 1946 by Nikolai Novikov, Soviet chargé d’affaires in Washington. In some ways, it was almost a mirror image (albeit a much less sophisticated one) of Kennan’s famous “long telegram” from Moscow, the report that later served as the basis for the influential “X” article. Both dispatches depicted the other side as driven by an insatiable urge for world domination, as being a power that could be contained only by superior force. Novikov, worried about America’s global reach, described the United States as trying to reduce Soviet influence in neighboring countries in order to hamper “the process of democratization” there and to create conditions “for the penetration of American capital into their economies.” The report concluded that, to achieve global dominance, the United States was using the threat of war against the Soviet Union (see document 3).

At home, the tightening of the screws intensified. Stalin was only too ready to use growing international tensions as justification for his campaign to mobilize the country, a campaign that presaged even more intense rivalry with the West. In August 1946, the official campaign against “ideological relaxation” and “servility” before the West—the “Zhdanovshchina”—was launched with the punishment of many literary journals and individuals for “crimes” and “mistakes.” In an angry tirade against “cosmopolitan” intellectuals, Stalin asserted: “You are walking on your tiptoes as if you were pupils and they [in the West] the mentors. It is wrong in its very essence.” Couched as it was against intellectuals, the campaign was also a shrewd appeal to Soviet patriotism and national dignity that appealed to many ordinary folk. In essence, Stalin was trying to root out admiration for Western culture by fostering pride in the Soviet Union’s ideology and social system and in its alleged cultural and moral superiority over the “rotten West.” Also as part of the campaign, Stalin retracted wartime concessions to the Orthodox Church and had official propaganda once again emphasize Soviet patriotism instead of the Russian nationalism that had come to the fore during World War II.

The campaign entailed more direct, although perhaps less publicly obvious efforts to reduce Western influence in Soviet territory. These included practical measures such as curtailing the distribution of British—American propagandistic publications (permitted during the war), a drastic reduction in subscriptions to foreign newspapers and books, and tightening of controls over personal contacts with foreigners—to the point of placing a ban on marriages with them in 1947. The iron curtain between the U.S.S.R. and the rest of the world was indeed going down (see document 4).

The anti-Western ideological campaign served to deflect popular discontent with mounting economic problems at home. The fall of 1946 was a season of a severe famine, caused by a bad harvest and aggravated by corruption and inefficiency in the government bureaucracy. When the Kremlin reduced bread rations and raised food prices, it channeled the anxiety caused by these steps toward foreign and domestic enemies. Widespread rumors explained the new restrictions as a part of “war preparations” for future contingencies. By the end of 1946, the basic Cold War psychology, a
vision of the world split into the two opposing systems, was talung hold of the Soviet mind-set. Those few people in Soviet officialdom who did not fully share this simple vision and who had growing misgivings about the Kremlin’s tough line, people such as Litvinov and Maisky, were being forced from their positions. The climate of growing international tensions helped sustain a semblance of solidarity between the Soviet people and their “Vozhd” (leader) in the face of external threat.

Especially effective was the propaganda theme of “a thankless West” that had won the war by Soviet blood and now was denigrating its former ally. One can see Zhdanov’s speech on November 6, 1946, celebrating the anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution, as a particularly vivid illustration of this theme. As usual, Stalin himself edited speeches prepared for the occasion. Judging by his notes on the draft’s margins, Stalin especially liked the following sarcastic passage, which he reinforced by adding the words “high moral qualities”: “If you read the western press now, it is amazing how the Soviet people have changed. When our blood was pouring over the battlefields of war, the Soviet people were admired and praised all over the world for their courage, endurance, and high moral qualities. And now they are being blamed for everything, including for having a very bad national character.”

Despite the growing and mutually nourished tensions, however, Soviet actions did not reveal serious concern about any looming Western aggression or preparations for a major war. Contrary to widespread assumptions in the West, demobilization reduced the size of the Red Army from 11,365,000 in 1945 to 2,874,000 by 1948, and the military budget of 1946–1947 was cut by almost 50 percent from its top war level to 73,700,000 rubles (or about half of the Pentagon’s budget). By the end of 1946, Soviet troops were withdrawn from Manchuria and the Danish island of Bornholm, which some officials in the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs had wanted to turn into their “Baltic Gibraltar.” Documentation on Soviet military planning during this period is still too scarce for firm conclusions, but available evidence (i.e., the operational plan for Soviet troops in Germany approved in November 1946) indicates that contrary to American expectations, Soviet contingency plans did not call for offensive operations in western Europe but concentrated instead on holding the line of defense in Germany.

In some respects, Soviet propaganda, too, observed limits. It still spoke in terms of “a struggle of two trends” in world politics, of “Anglo–American reaction,” without directly identifying either with the U.S. and British governments. Stalin carefully crossed out references to an “Anglo–American bloc” in his subordinates’ drafts of public statements; he usually replaced them with the more neutral “England and the U.S.A.” Through the time of his interview with Harold Stassen in April 1947, Stalin kept talung about peaceful coexistence between socialism and capitalism, carefully preserving his moderate image. Avoiding open confrontation, Stalin continued his tough bargaining over Germany and other unresolved issues. From his perspective, the Rubicon of the Cold War still lay ahead.

EFFECTS OF THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE MARSHALL PLAN

The proclamation of the Truman Doctrine in March 1947 had no immediate impact on Soviet thinking and policy. The Kremlin was naturally concerned about the global overtones of the American crusade against a “totalitarian” threat, but the doctrine’s practical meaning, assistance to Greece and Turkey, was neither surprising nor immediately challenging. Because both Greece and Turkey were by then in the Western sphere of influence, Truman’s action simply confirmed the Soviet view that the United States was filling in the weak spots of the British Empire.

Accordingly, the Soviet government did not issue any protest or offer any other official reaction to Truman’s speech. An editorial in Pravda depicted it as another manifestation of U.S. expansionism and confined itself to a guarded warning that the doctrine was “not conducive to the cause of peace and security.” Soviet diplomats reporting from the United States were restrained in their analysis, which emphasized the tentative and controversial nature of a move that faced serious resistance in America itself. When Stalin met with Secretary of State George C. Marshall during the meeting of foreign ministers in Moscow in April, he ignored the subject completely, concentrating instead on Germany. And although the former allies remained deadlocked between the Soviet insistence on reparations and the Western desire for German economic unity, Stalin showed patience and cautious optimism, saying in conclusion that “compromises were possible on all main questions, including Germany’s demilitarization, political structure, reparations, and economic unity.”

Indeed, some new Soviet foreign policy initiatives during the first part of 1947 also indicated a potentially more cooperative approach, especially with regard to Korea and international control of atomic energy. Concerning the reunification of Korea, the Soviet side broke the logjam in Soviet–American talks by agreeing to speed up the work of the joint commission charged with establishing an interim government. On atomic energy, there was a shift from