Smith protested, only to be told by Molotov that the Soviet government had no control over its press (though even this statement had to be cleared with Stalin, whereupon the foreign minister reminded his boss about the Gorbachev commission). Another small but telling detail is that political caricatures in the Soviet press that had previously dealt only with generalized images of American “capitalists” began to depict President Truman and his fellow “cold warriors,” while the Cold War itself was fleshed out in the image of an old witch with ugly, icy features.

At the same time, the last remaining channels of Western propaganda in the Soviet Union were being closed. A popular Russian-language magazine, Amerika, and its British counterpart were quietly taken out of public distribution late in 1947, and early in 1948 Soviet technicians began the jamming of Russian-language programs over Voice of America and the British Broadcasting Company. The iron curtain had come down all the way (see document 4).

CRISES OF 1948–1949 AND THE DEEP FREEZE

The Kremlin maintained, with some fine-tuning, the dual Cominform strategy—disruption in the West, consolidation in eastern Europe—into 1948. With regard to western Europe, the typically cautious Stalin continued a balancing act between trying to cripple implementation of the Marshall Plan and not provoking a feared direct American intervention in Italy and France. That danger was particularly acute in Italy, where hard-fought elections took place in 1948, in connection with which the possibility of a communist victory led to contingency planning for the introduction of American troops. Fearing such a scenario, the Kremlin advised Italian communists not to start an armed insurrection. Despite earlier calls to form armed underground movements, Molotov told them that an insurrection would be “entirely inappropriate” and could be resorted to only in response to a military attack by reactionary forces. The United States poured millions of dollars into the election campaign in support of noncommunist parties, and the Kremlin had to swallow electoral defeat in Italy. This setback put an end to high hopes for the “Euro-communism” of the 1940s.

HARSH CRACKDOWN IN EASTERN EUROPE

Losing ground in the West, the Kremlin redoubled its efforts to seal off and ensure its control of eastern Europe. Here, the weakest link remained

Czechoslovakia, where local communists were still sharing power with other parties. Faced with a prospect of defeat in upcoming parliamentary elections, they flirted with the idea of staging a preventive coup, but hesitated before taking the final step. The Kremlin sent Molotov’s deputy, Valerian Zorin, to Prague as a troubleshooter, but instructed him not to meet with President Eduard Beneš. As the situation became tenser, Zorin reported to Moscow that “Gottwald still would like to avoid any tough measures against the reaction [noncommunists] although the latter has become quite brazen.”

Contrary to traditional assumptions in the West, newly declassified documents show that Moscow neither gave any direct orders to Gottwald nor offered to move Soviet troops in Germany and Austria close to the Czechoslovak borders. They suggest, in fact, that it was Gottwald who, looking for face-saving “outside pressure,” asked Zorin for the deployment of troops. Molotov’s instructions to Zorin on February 22 were quite definite: “Proposals to move Soviet troops in Germany and Austria as well as to give Gottwald orders from Moscow we consider uncalled for.” Obviously not wanting to trigger a Western reaction by showing its hand too openly, the Kremlin merely advised Gottwald “to stand more firmly, not to yield to the right, and not to hesitate.” It was rightly assumed that Gottwald understood what was expected of him.

Using well-organized mass demonstrations as leverage, communists forced President Beneš to permit a restructuring of the cabinet before elections, thus creating a situation in which it could be packed with communists. Foreign Minister Masaryk died under mysterious circumstances, ostensibly (and officially) by committing suicide. In the next three months, the communist-dominated cabinet rewrote the country’s constitution and conducted rigged parliamentary elections, which gave them an overwhelming majority. Anguished by these events, Beneš resigned, to be replaced by his nemesis, Gottwald. The new president and his party proceeded to purge noncommunists from the governmental bureaucracy and to emasculate their former partners in the National Front.

Czechoslovakia, described by visiting Polish communists only few months earlier as “the last state among people’s democracies that American imperialism was still counting on,” finally became a Soviet-type state. Now, Stalin could afford to be more generous with economic help for a loyal ally in dire straits. In other respects, too, the price of victory was high: The Kremlin’s camouflage notwithstanding, events in Czechoslovakia, which became known as the “coup de Prague,” frightened western European countries into closer ties with the United States and hastened the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).
Just as the “least reliable” “non-Soviet” ally was being transformed into a reliable Soviet one, the Kremlin’s former favorite, communist Yugoslavia, was losing Moscow’s trust. The cooling-off period in Soviet–Yugoslav relations, which began late in 1947, reflected changes on both sides: Tito’s growing appetite for regional hegemony in the Balkans, on the one hand, and Stalin’s diminishing tolerance of such wayward independence, on the other. To Stalin’s great annoyance, Tito attempted to speed up the conclusion of a Yugoslav–Bulgarian treaty; to engage the Soviet Union more deeply in the civil war in Greece (which Stalin thought too risky a gamble); and finally, without the Kremlin’s sanction, to introduce Yugoslav troops into Albania, which Tito wanted to incorporate. Disturbed by this challenge to his project of building a hierarchic Soviet bloc, Stalin decided to nip the incipient rebellion in the bud by teaching Tito (and potential imitators in eastern Europe) a sharp lesson in the dangers of insubordination.

Early in 1948, the Kremlin took several harsh steps. It rejected Belgrade’s request for a loan and a trade treaty; recalled Soviet military advisers from Yugoslavia; and launched a series of accusations, both directly and through the Cominform, that the leaders of Yugoslavia were opportunistic, deviant, and anti-Soviet. Then, for a final humiliation, it summoned the Yugoslav leaders to the next meeting of the Cominform, which, as everyone knew, would be set up as a collective inquisition. Accustomed to having his way with “junior partners” in eastern Europe, Stalin seriously underestimated Yugoslavia’s stubbornness. Tito refused to subject himself to the Cominform’s whipping, and Moscow’s relentless campaign of harassment and pressure failed to intimidate or split the tight Yugoslav leadership.

Tito’s defiance led to a severe setback for the Kremlin. The absence of a common border and possible international repercussions severely restricted Stalin’s military options against the dissident ally, and as the conflict escalated politically, it produced the first open split in the postwar international communist movement. Excommunicated from the latter, Yugoslavia turned to the West for military and economic assistance. Delighted and hopeful, the United States started a covert campaign to stimulate Tito-like defections in other east European countries.

Having failed in his immediate goal of subduing Belgrade, Stalin used this conflict to tighten his grip over his satellites still further. Local communist parties were purged of “Titoist elements” and “their agents,” who were now equated with “fascists.” The resulting witch-hunt atmosphere allowed some communist leaders to settle personal scores with party rivals by denouncing them as “Titoists” and “traitors.” Although Stalin occasionally tried to restrain the blood-thirsty zeal of his henchmen, these vendettas served his purpose well because the blood of the victims tied the survivors to Moscow.

The Kremlin also took steps to speed up the political and economic integration of eastern Europe. It imposed almost identical treaties of “friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance” on Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and Finland in 1948 (similar treaties had been concluded earlier with Poland, Yugoslavia, and Czechoslovakia). Each of them contained clauses calling for military cooperation in the event of attack by Germany and its allies. The Soviet government decided, after some vacillation, to continue to identify Germany as the principal threat not, as Molotov explained to his east European counterparts, because it failed to see other potential sources of aggression, but because it did not want to dramatize the situation and sought to emphasize the contrast between the “firm, self-confident tone” of the Soviet government and the “nervous tone” of governments in the West. Molotov evidently had in mind the Brussels Pact concluded by Great Britain, France, and the Benelux countries in March 1948, which included security guarantees against not only Germany, but also “other countries,” presumably—and disturbingly—the U.S.S.R., as well. This pact, which had the blessing of the United States, caused serious concern in the Kremlin as a sign of hostile intentions.

Soviet strategy was to stay one step behind the West in solidifying the division of Germany and the continent as a whole. Because the United States had already moved to foster the economic integration of western Europe through the Marshall Plan, the Kremlin responded in December 1948 with the decision to set up a council to coordinate economic cooperation between the U.S.S.R. and five east European countries (with Yugoslavia excluded). The council’s purpose was to create closer economic ties among member states and to provide a common front, a Soviet bloc, in the world economy, thus to discourage the West from using lack of coordination in eastern Europe for their own interests. The formal establishment of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (known both as CMEA and as Comecon) took place in Moscow a month later (in January 1949).

THE BERLIN BLOCKADE, NATO, AND OTHER ISSUES

The most important crisis of 1948 took place over the most crucial of Cold War issues: Germany. The evolution of U.S. policy reinforced Soviet suspicions of Western aims in Germany. As an internal memorandum on the subject that circulated in the Foreign Ministry early in October 1947 stressed, the Soviet Union was faced with “a real threat of the political dismemberment of
Germany and the inclusion of West Germany, with all its resources, in the western bloc, pulled together by the United States." Soviet diplomats made an effort to reverse this trend by proposing a peace treaty that would create "a united democratic Germany," but the initiative was rebuffed at a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in London late in 1947.

Molotov boasted to Stalin that he "struck at the allies' weak spot" by pressing them on their alleged plans of zonal consolidation. But he was unable to disrupt those plans. France agreed to unify its occupation zone with the U.S. and British zones (Bizonia) to create Trizonia, and then, at a separate conference in London, the United States, Britain, France, and the Benelux countries took the decisive step of proposing a West German constituent assembly—that is, the establishment of a West German state. That development, coupled with ongoing preparations for the introduction of a new currency in the emerging Trizonia, was rightly perceived in Moscow as a complete break with the Yalta–Potsdam agreements on four-power control over Germany, especially since the conference in London was summoned without even informing the fourth party to the German settlement, the U.S.S.R.

In analyzing these events for the Kremlin, the Soviet Foreign Ministry concluded that "the western powers are transforming Germany into their stronghold and [intend to include] it in the newly formed military–political bloc, directed against the Soviet Union and the new democracies [in eastern Europe]." Desperate to forestall such developments, the Kremlin decided to counterattack by using the most tangible advantage it still held in Germany: control over the geographic space between the western zones and Berlin, which was located in the heart of the Soviet zone.

The Soviet leadership must have made the key decision early in March 1948, when Marshal Vasily Sokolovsky, the Soviet representative on the Allied Control Council, and Vladimir Semyenov, a political adviser in Berlin, were urgently summoned to Moscow. Following his return, Sokolovsky stalked from the Control Council's meeting on March 20, thus paralyzing that body. By April 1, a series of restrictions were introduced on the communication lines between Berlin and the western zones, and within days the Berlin blockade began in earnest. The Soviet argument for it was not without a certain logic: Since the London decisions ran counter to the Potsdam agreements and the allied control mechanism based on those agreements, the Western presence in Berlin lost its earlier justification, and the Soviet side had justification for closing its occupation zone.

What did Stalin expect from this high-stakes showdown? Was he trying to "kick them [the Western allies] out" of Berlin, as he told East Ger-

man leaders in March, and as Truman believed? Or did he want, by weakening their position in Berlin, to force them into reversing the London decisions and reopening negotiations about a German settlement, as he repeatedly told Western contacts during subsequent meetings? The second version seems more likely, although had the Western powers decided to retreat, Stalin would certainly not have minded that outcome, either.

At first, prospects looked good from the Soviet side. Most observers assumed that West Berlin could not survive in isolation. "Our control-and-restrictive measures have dealt a strong blow to the prestige of the Americans and Britons in Germany," the chief of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany reported to Moscow on April 17. They added that (as they wanted to believe) the German population thought that "the Anglo-Americans have retreated before the Russians" and that "this testifies to the Russians' strength." With municipal elections looming in West Berlin, Soviet officials sought to discredit the Western powers by picturing them as helpless to resist the blockade. They hoped that fearful or resigned citizens of West Berlin would turn to Soviet authorities for the necessities of life.

But the tide soon began to turn. The Kremlin underestimated Western resolve and ingenuity. The massive airlift became a solution that Soviet officials could negate only by risking an open military conflict, which was not a part of their plan. While the stalemate continued, the Western powers proceeded with currency reform and with plans for creating a West German state. Stalin's increasing anger over and frustration at Western defiance found an outlet mainly in his handwritten remarks on documents placed before him. For example, in the margins of a translated diplomatic note from Paris, he penned these comments: "Scoundrels"; "It is all lies"; "It is not a blockade, but a defensive measure"; and "Ha-ha!" But in talks with the three Western ambassadors in August, Stalin was firm and in full control, insisting that their governments cancel or at least postpone implementation of the London decisions. The Western powers remained adamant, however, and after prolonged procrastination, Moscow finally had to retreat fully and to acknowledge their rights in Berlin.

Again, as with Turkey and Iran, Stalin's hardball tactics, which he pursued far too long, proved to be counterproductive. Instead of blocking the implementation of the Western plan for Germany, the Berlin blockade accelerated it. Moreover, the brutal pressure scared other west European countries into closer alliance with the United States. The road to NATO was now open. Stalin's worst fear, a U.S.–led Western bloc united against the Soviet Union, was coming into being, in large part thanks to his own inadvertent
assistance. As Russian historians Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov have noted, Stalin "did not want the Cold War but... did not know how to avoid it."

In 1948–1949, Soviet–American diplomacy almost came to a halt as propaganda and mutual recriminations replaced serious negotiations. Even the usual niceties of diplomatic discourse fell victim to the rancor. In May 1948, the U.S. State Department, concerned that Stalin might misread American intentions and overreact, sent the Kremlin a confidential message through Ambassador Smith that contained two basic points: (1) the United States would not accept any new Soviet encroachment "beyond the present limits" of communist power, but it had no plans for a military attack against the U.S.S.R., and (2) the current U.S. policy was not subject to change because of presidential elections or economic downturn, but "the door is always open for full discussion and the composing of our differences."

Molotov responded in appropriate diplomatic tones, but in reality the Kremlin was no more ready to enter that door than was the White House. Stalin jotted a sarcastic "Ha-ha!" by the quoted passage in Smith's note, and evidently decided both to embarrass the Americans and to use the incident for propaganda purposes. He had the text of the Smith–Molotov exchange published in the Soviet press without informing the American side ahead of time. Russian propaganda treated Smith's demarche as an example of U.S. hypocrisy mixed with the inability to come up with any constructive ideas for improving Soviet–American relations.

This blow-up was only part of an intensive propaganda campaign designed to discredit "Truman's hawks" in the upcoming presidential election. The Kremlin watched that election very closely, giving special attention to the Progressive party's candidate, Henry A. Wallace, who seemed to promise a real alternative to the administration's Cold War policies. Stalin evidently had high hopes that a strong showing by Wallace could conceivably become a catalyst for the resurrection of the "Roosevelt trend" in U.S. politics. Although Stalin advised Wallace that a visit to Moscow would be too risky (for Wallace's campaign), he approved of the idea of a public appeal in the form of an open letter. When Wallace's letter was published by the New York Times on May 12, less than a week after publication of the Smith–Molotov exchange, Stalin promptly responded with an open letter of his own, calling Wallace's a "very important document" that could provide a "fruitful basis... for coexistence" and for the "peaceful resolution of differences between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A."

The Wallace–Stalin exchange made a big splash around the world, but it made it easier for Truman and American conservatives to tag Wallace as a fellow traveler being used by Moscow. More importantly, Stalin's brutal action in Berlin and eastern Europe belied his own words about peace and coexistence and contributed to Truman's surprising victory in November. Moscow still confronted the same policies in Washington.

Within the Soviet Union itself, 1948 was a year of growing tensions and escalating repression. The anti-Western, xenophobic campaign reached new heights with a struggle against so-called cosmopolitans, mostly Jews in various professions. Thus, the Kremlin resurrected popular anti-Semitism both to weed out Western influence and to rally the Soviet mob against foreign enemies and their "domestic agents." Thousands of Jewish officials and intellectuals, including Molotov's wife, were sent to prison on fabricated espionage charges; some of them were "officially" executed (e.g., Molotov's orthodox deputy Solomon Lozovsky), and some secretly assassinated (e.g., the famous actor and theatre director Solomon Mikhoels).

Stalin's spy-and-enemy mania peaked as the Cold War became more frigid. His working assumption was that Western imperialism would now redouble its efforts to organize a "fifth column" within the Soviet bloc, as he himself was trying to do in the Western sphere, a fear that was not without some basis. The Kremlin knew about the reorganization of the U.S. intelligence community and its covert operations in Europe and Asia. Indeed, scholars are now learning that the scope of those operations was much wider than previously thought, for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in fact got into the business of setting up emigre groups to serve as nuclei for future anti-Soviet revolts all over eastern Europe. "Such units," wrote Kennan, then a State Department liaison with the CIA, to one of his colleagues in the fall of 1948, "may represent a closer approximation of the absolute weapon than the atomic bomb," over which the United States still enjoyed a monopoly.

Such calculations would not have surprised Stalin. Moscow was monitoring the activities of anti-Soviet Russian immigrants in the United States and paying special attention to their frequent contacts with the U.S. government. The Kremlin was also aware that Washington was working with members of the old German intelligence network specializing in Soviet matters. Together, these developments left the Kremlin in no doubt that Americans were sheltering its most rabid enemies in order to use them against the U.S.S.R.

There were indeed a number of real spy cases in the early postwar years, but Stalin's response to this problem was way out of proportion. Early in March 1949, he dismissed even close subordinates such as Foreign Minister Molotov and Foreign Trade Minister Mikoyan from their cabinet posts...
for alleged lack of vigilance. His obsession with internal enemies was reflected in a speech before the CPSU's Central Committee on March 30, 1949 (recorded in fragments by the editor-in-chief of Pravda, Pyetr Pospelov): “Where is the main danger now? It comes from honest fools and blind. At the hands of such honest but blind people our country can perish. . . . Our enemies conduct their policy by these fools’ hands.”

By that time, Stalin was himself blinded by the crackdown on his intelligence network in the United States. Except for a rapidly shrinking British connection (mostly through Kim Philby, London’s liaison with the CIA since the fall of 1949), the Truman White House became impenetrable to Soviet eyes. And although the general course of American policy looked more or less clear and settled, the details did not, and people in the Kremlin still hoped that some concessions on the key questions of Germany and the Western bloc might be forthcoming.

It may have been this combination of uncertainty and hope that pushed Stalin to one of his most intriguing moves in 1949. Documents from the Kremlin archives reveal that in January 1949, Stalin was seriously considering the idea of using Wallace, who had offered his mediation, as a secret channel between the Kremlin and the White House. According to Molotov’s draft instructions to the Soviet ambassador in Washington, the main purpose of such a risky operation would be to find out “whether there is any tendency in the U.S. government toward improving relations with the U.S.S.R.”

Stalin zigzagged on this project. He began by turning it down, then changed his mind and gave it a green light, only to reverse himself again in a few days after initial contacts in Washington. In an interview with American journalists, Stalin offered to meet with Truman to discuss ways to improve Soviet–American relations—a gesture then written off as a propaganda trick, but one now acquiring new meaning in the context of the Wallace mediation project. Overall, this abortive “peace feeler” betrays not only the Kremlin’s ignorance about the realities of power in Washington, but also Stalin’s desperate hope for some last-minute loosening of the U.S. position before the division of Germany became final and NATO was established. His secret diplomacy having failed, Stalin went on making efforts at least to forestall both of those developments.

Soviet agents tried to follow the process of secret negotiations over the North Atlantic Treaty. From the Soviet standpoint, the most troubling aspects of the emerging alliance were the leading role of the United States and the obvious intent to widen its geostrategic orbit by bringing Italy, Spain, and Portugal, as well as Scandinavian countries, into the alliance. Soviet analysts also emphasized the conspicuous facts that Germany was not named as a potential enemy and that no country from the Soviet bloc was asked to join the alliance—a combination that in Soviet eyes was sure proof of the treaty’s anti-Soviet thrust. Also worrisome to the Kremlin were leaks in the Western press about a possible “secret protocol” to the treaty calling for “terminating” west European communist parties’ activities in case of war or the immediate threat of it.

The first official Soviet reaction to the proposed North Atlantic Treaty was a statement issued by the Foreign Ministry on January 29, 1949. It protested that the draft treaty was directed against the U.S.S.R., and that it violated the UN Charter as well as the Soviet Union’s wartime treaties with Britain and France. In February, the Kremlin approached the government of Norway, which has a long border with the U.S.S.R., with an offer for a nonaggression treaty. Moscow was greatly concerned about the prospect of Western military bases at the country’s doorstep and wanted to lure Norway away from the emerging alliance. But Oslo declined the offer, while uttering assurances that it would remain Moscow’s good neighbor even as a member of NATO.

Even less productive were the Kremlin’s other preventive moves: threats to annul treaties with Britain and France, the instigation of mass anti–NATO demonstrations by west European communists, and the concentration of troops near Yugoslavia. If anything, these steps facilitated the concluding stage of treaty negotiations by accentuating the specter of a “Soviet threat.” On March 31, only days before the treaty was to be signed, the Politburo solemnly reiterated and amplified the Foreign Ministry’s statement. From that point on, Soviet policy, as earlier with the Marshall Plan, became one of trying to disrupt implementation of the treaty by staging an intensive anti–NATO campaign through the Cominform, local communist parties, and the newly created Soviet Peace Committee, a “public” organization created in August 1949 that became the nucleus for an extended network of similar front organizations all over the world.

The formation of NATO was a crucial development for the Soviet Union. It meant a military–political follow-up to the economic division of Europe started by the Marshall Plan and resulted in the institutionalization of a Western anti-Soviet bloc headed by the United States that the Kremlin had tried so hard but ineffectually to prevent. In addition, the openly confrontational configuration in Europe meant that the Soviet Union could not consider reducing its presence in eastern and central Europe, for that would be an unacceptable loss of face before an implacable enemy. Moscow saw as its only choices the firm retention of its control over its orbit or the
resort to war and even more brutal repression should that control be directly challenged.

Despite this stark situation, Stalin still sought to forestall a final division of Germany. In part it was a matter of tactics; he still wanted to stay one step behind the Western powers in order to avoid responsibility for the country's division. At a meeting in December 1948, he told East German leaders: "You do not want to act as the initiators of Germany's split and that is only natural. But if a separate West German government is formed, ... a government should also be formed in Berlin." At the same time, Stalin still saw a united, neutral, and demilitarized German state as preferable to complete separation. In his view, the latter condition would be neither durable nor beneficial for the Soviet interests in the long run. A student of Bismarck's and Hitler's policies, Stalin was deeply impressed by German nationalism, which he thought was likely to overwhelm foreign occupation and to foment "German revanchism" once again. He probably also suspected that a much smaller and poorer East Germany would not be competitive against its more productive, U.S.-supported counterpart. Besides, separation would deprive the Soviet Union of its ultimate prize in Germany: access to the Ruhr region, the country's industrial heartland.

So even after the key decision to set up a West German state was reached on April 25, 1949, the Soviet government continued to fight back. It tried to hold off the final stage of this process and presented itself as the only champion of German unity. When Stalin detected a lack of resolve on the part of his new foreign minister, Andrei Vyshinsky, during a discussion of the German question at the Council of Foreign Ministers in May, he sent stern warnings about Western "machinations": "It looks as if you don't quite understand that the three powers' proposal boils down to their intent to merge the eastern zone with the western ones on their own terms, [which are] absolutely unacceptable to us; they want to swallow our zone and to tie us to their chariot in Germany, depriving us at the same time of those rights to reparations which we received in Potsdam." Because the Soviet counter-proposal was not going through, Stalin instructed Vyshinsky "to emphasize the contrast between their separatist position and our proposals, aimed at creating a united, democratic, peace-loving German state."

Meanwhile, perhaps still hoping for the best but also preparing for the worst, Stalin continued with the covert, methodical Sovietization of the eastern zone. Documents from East German archives confirm that by the early 1949, the Socialist Unity party was fully transformed into a Bolshevik-type party and that internal security forces were beefed up under close Soviet guidance to monitor and subdue remaining opposition groups. Embryonic military units and training centers were set up, under the auspices of the (East) German "Directorate for the Interior," in the summer of 1948 on Stalin's personal orders. All these steps could serve dual purposes: They could provide the nucleus of a separate East German state or become the institutional bases for Soviet influence in a united Germany. When finally, in October 1949, the formation of the German Democratic Republic (G.D.R.) was announced, the new entity was called "provisional," which was meant, as Stalin told his East German clients, to "serve as a hint that the government has been formed [only] . . . until Germany is unified."

THE SOVIET A-BOMB, THE SINO-SOVET TREATY, AND THE WAR IN KOREA

Between the ratification of the North Atlantic Treaty and the establishment of the G.D.R., the Western world was shaken by news of the first atomic explosion in the Soviet Union. The giant effort, aided by successful espionage, bore fruit several years earlier than Washington had expected (see document 8). Although the test in Semipalatinsk, Kazakhstan, took place on August 29, the Soviet side kept silent about it, and it was not until September 23 that President Truman publicly acknowledged the event. "Truman's announcement has produced an incredible uproar here," Vyshinsky gleefully reported to Stalin from his UN post in New York; "naturally, I am not going to make any comments on this."

Low-profile was indeed the Soviet way of spinning this awesome news, but the Kremlin certainly appreciated its significance and was greatly relieved by the end of America's atomic monopoly. In a closed ceremony at which he gave awards to key participants in the atomic project, Stalin said, "Had it taken another year or year and a half for us to develop the bomb, we would have probably 'tasted it on ourselves.'" Nevertheless, having countered America's atomic ace, Stalin decided to downplay the matter publicly as much as possible. For one thing, he did not want to admit, even in retrospect, that the United States had indeed had this key strategic advantage over the Soviet Union for four long years—something that the Kremlin had kept hidden from Soviet citizens all that time. Besides, Soviet propaganda was constantly playing on the contrast between the "atomic blackmail" and "saber rattling" of "western imperialism" on the one hand, and the Kremlin's "strong nerves" and peaceful intentions, on the other.

That is why Stalin handled his own announcement in a low-key way. He personally drafted a press release as a semi-official response to
Stalin's Soviet Union was seeking security or expansion? Was Stalin ready to take new risks in Asia? In April 1950, he finally gave the green light to North Korean leader Kim Il Sung, who had made repeated requests for Soviet backing of a military attack against South Korea. Stalin had several reasons for adopting such a policy. New circumstances, including what appeared to be a lack of U.S. commitment to South Korea's security, seemed to offer an opportunity to expand the area under his control and to encourage revolutionaries in other parts of Asia. Moreover, the seizure of South Korea might reinforce communist China's isolation from the West, thus making that country more dependent on the U.S.S.R. But Stalin got a different war in Korea from the one he expected. As things turned out, Kim's large-scale attack across the thirty-eighth parallel in Korea on June 25, 1950, set the course for intensification of the Cold War and for massive militarization on both sides of the ideological divide.

CONCLUSION: STALIN'S COLD WAR STRATEGY IN RETROSPECT

It has been half a century since the beginning of the Cold War and about a decade since its sudden end. Yet despite recent research in newly opened archives, some basic questions about the Soviet road to the Cold War remain. Was Stalin's Soviet Union seeking security or expansion? Was Stalin a revolutionary romantic, a Russian/Soviet imperialist, a cynical practitioner of Realpolitik, or a megalomaniac craving power for power's sake? Furthermore, was he a genius, however evil, or an inept bungler who often ended up getting precisely what he sought to avoid? Such questions may have no definitive answers, but one can draw some tentative conclusions.

First, there was clearly some logic to what often looked like the madness of Soviet foreign policy. Its overriding goal was remarkably consistent throughout World War II and the Cold War: security through aggrandizement and consolidation of the Soviet sphere. The ways to that goal were varied and at times contradictory, from an amicable deal with Hitler on dividing
the continent to a lethal war against Hitler's empire, and from alliance with Britain and the United States to Cold War against these former comrades in arms. The Bolsheviks in the Kremlin were entirely unscrupulous and free-wheeling in selecting policies to fit changing circumstances.

Whether they were guided primarily by Marxist ideology or by national security interests is largely an artificial distinction. Ideology was important as a prism through which Soviet leaders saw the world and which made them predisposed to see U.S. policies as expansionist and threatening. Thus, ideology contributed to suspicions and tensions as the Soviet-Marxist version of universalist vision clashed with the liberal exceptionalism of its American counterpart. Besides, in the Bolshevik mentality, ideology and national interests were blended into a single whole since for Stalin and his lieutenants preservation and expansion of the Soviet domain were necessary for promoting world revolution. “Whatever is good for the Soviet Union is good for the world revolution” was an unwritten rule for the men in the Kremlin, who saw no inherent contradiction between those two goals. But whenever there was a conflict between Soviet egotism and ideological interests, they would invariably choose the former over the latter. For Stalin and his circle, enhancing Soviet power, which also meant enhancing their own power, was, unsurprisingly, the first priority. To it they subordinated everything and everyone else, whether the Russian people, foreign communists, or former capitalist allies.

Much the same can be said about the elusive line between security and expansion. Here, however, Soviet concerns were hardly new. As empire builders from Romans to Britons illustrate, security through expansion was no Soviet invention. Even in America’s case, as Walter Lippmann once said, seeking security and building an empire were two sides of the same coin. It is even debatable whether Soviet empire-builders were any more driven by ideological universalism than their American rivals, although for Americans ideology was more amorphous than for the Bolsheviks.

Both sides in the Cold War exhibited symmetry in their strategic thinking as well. After all, Soviet leaders had their own crude version of containment. In Marxist terms, Western capitalism was both hostile and inherently unstable. The task confronting the Kremlin, then, was to hold the line and exploit the capitalist enemy’s difficulties until its internal contradictions would lead to a new cycle of depression, war, and revolution—developments that would, in the Soviet view, make possible another breakthrough for communism. The experience of Stalin’s generation seemed to validate such expectations. World War I and the Russian Revolution paved the way for the emergence of the first socialist state, and

then the Great Depression and World War II made possible the expansion of the Soviet system.

Indeed, in Moscow’s view, the latter development was the major cause for the West’s reversion to Cold War, but that price seemed justified. As Molotov later claimed, “We had to consolidate what we had conquered, to make our part of Germany socialist, to establish order in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia, etc., all of which were in a very fluid condition. So, we had to squeeze out the capitalist order—hence the Cold War.”

Those policies affirmed, Molotov added another note of realism, however: “Naturally one has to observe limits. I think Stalin abided by them very well.” One might well ask how differently relations between the Soviet Union and the West would have developed had Stalin avoided provocative acts in essentially peripheral areas, such as those in the cases of Turkey, Iran, Manchuria, and Korea. But seen overall, the Kremlin’s boss was basically cautious in his waging of the Cold War; he sometimes came close to, but never crossed, the fatal line of direct military collision with the United States. In this sense, he was a fitting, one might even say responsible, partner-adversary for Western leaders who were pushing their own agenda and who, like Stalin, were concerned about the danger of the opponent’s overreaction to unwanted pressure.

There was, nevertheless, a substantial and significant difference between the Soviet and American empires during the Cold War. It lay in the nature of imperial control and the methods used to build spheres of influence. The American empire was generally pluralistic and open, while the Soviet one was totalitarian and closed. To put it more colorfully, a Soviet “empire by rape” stood in contrast to an American “empire by seduction” (or as Geir Lundestad puts it, “by invitation” on the part of countries afraid of being raped). More than anything else, it was Soviet heavy-handedness that made its sphere, which covered much of the Eurasian landmass, unacceptable to the United States both for domestic and geopolitical reasons. It was also the legacy of that heavy-handedness that doomed the Soviet empire itself to rapid disintegration once its leaders disavowed the threat of military suppression against its satellites.

But Soviet policy options, far from being simply a matter of free choice, were always constrained by the weight of history, by lack of resources, and by the nature of the Stalinist system. The Soviet Union was, as John Lewis Gaddis persuasively suggests, essentially “a one-dimensional power” that lacked economic, cultural, and other “soft” power levers. When confronting multidimensional American power, the U.S.S.R. had to maximize its main asset: military power. Moreover, Soviet leaders could not count on countries
in eastern Europe, where old enmities and anti-Russian feelings were historically strong, to be both fully independent and pro-Soviet. Finally, Soviet leaders, accustomed to total control over their own subjects and knowing no other way to organize society, could confidently deal only with puppets running familiar Soviet-type systems. In short, given their history, political system, and priorities, as well as challenges from the West, Soviet leaders could hardly have done other than they did in creating their Cold War empire.

If such was indeed the inescapable logic of Soviet strategy, then one must ask how effective Soviet leaders really were in pursuing their own aims. For many years, observers have repeatedly made the case that by frightening the West into united opposition to Soviet policy instead of engaging it in a more skillful game of give-and-take, one that might have undermined Western resolve, Stalin was his own worst enemy. As early as 1950 Kennan observed that it was primarily Soviet actions that made it possible for “us [Americans] to pull ourselves together and to increase our strength” when a different approach might “have had us . . . in a [grave] state of unpreparedness.”

Although Soviet understanding of American politics was too crude for such fine-tuning, one can make the case that the men in the Kremlin saw the stakes as too high to allow risky efforts—experiments, really—to accommodate their rival. If even the United States, with its preponderant, multidimensional power and margin of safety, could or would not adopt a more accommodating policy (never mind the reasons why it would not), then in the view of the Kremlin, a weaker Soviet Union could afford one even less. For both sides, the premium was on toughness and on worst-case scenarios, which together led to escalation of the conflict between them.

But would notably different U.S. policy have changed Soviet behavior? The prevailing view in the West is that it would not have. We can never be certain, however, for after the death of Roosevelt the United States never really put accommodation to the test.

Perhaps one should ask the reverse question, too, one almost never asked. What would the Soviet side have had to do to accommodate the Americans and thus end the Cold War? American “terms of settlement” were no secret to the Kremlin, for they were occasionally spelled out by Secretary of State Dean Acheson and other high-ranking U.S. officials: Soviet withdrawal from central and eastern Europe, lifting the iron curtain, stopping anti-American propaganda, and ending support for communists in other parts of the world. In the view of the men then in the Kremlin, acquiescence in such demands would have stripped the Soviet Union of its security belt in Europe, betrayed what it leaders saw as its global mission, and exposed the still young and battered system to destabilizing ideological “contamination” from abroad. Judging by the subsequent fate of the Soviet empire, those fears were not altogether unfounded. In short, for the Soviet side, these were terms of capitulation, not of reasonable accommodation. The Soviet Union was too strong to accept such terms—too strong to capitulate and too weak ultimately to win. Such was the essence of Stalin’s Cold War predicament.

From another perspective, however, perhaps Stalin’s greatest strategic blunder lay in engaging his country, so much in need of reform and rebuilding, in a global power struggle that could not be won. Did he, in considering the options available to him, make a fundamentally flawed choice? If so, it took almost fifty years of Cold War to demonstrate that point.
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