FOR THE SOUL OF MANKIND

THE UNITED STATES, THE SOVIET UNION, AND

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Stalin did not encourage communist revolution because he was most preoccupied with enhancing the security, self-interest, and well-being of the Soviet Union. To do this, he wanted to preserve the allied coalition, for he believed it was in the interest of the Soviet Union to do so. There was a huge task of reconstruction ahead. The Americans might provide loans. At the very least, their cooperation, and British assent, would be needed to extract huge reparations from Germany—from the Ruhr and the Rhineland and from the eastern parts of the country that his armies would occupy. Most of all, British and American cooperation would be essential to control and monitor the revival of German and Japanese power. In June 1944, when Stalin met with members of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, the Lublin Poles, he told them that Poland "needs alliances with the Western states, with Great Britain, France, and friendly relations with America."[70]

Stalin's overriding concern as the war came to an end was to control against the revival of German power. In conversation after conversation, with communists and noncommunists, with east Europeans and west Europeans, with Americans and British, the specter of German power loomed large. Even "after the defeat of Germany the danger of war/invasion [sic] will continue to exist," he told Bulgarian and Yugoslav communists. "History teaches us," he said to the Lublin Poles, "that one must not wait long for recovery of the German power." "In 1871," Stalin remembered, "Germany attacked France. . . . Forty years later, in 1914, Germany attacked again. After the last World War, Germany restored its strength and began to wage war in 1939. Germany possesses an immense regenerative capability." If halfhearted measures were taken, Stalin believed, "we will have a new war in 15 years."[71]

No matter how total would be the impending German defeat, the Soviet Union could never feel secure. History, experience, and ideology shaped the Soviet view. The Germans, Stalin said, "do not believe in human feelings."[72] In March 1945, he said,

> We are now smashing the Germans, and many people now assume that the Germans will never be able to threaten us again. Well, that simply is not true. I HATE THE GERMANS. . . . It's

> impossible to destroy the Germans for good, they will still be around. We are fighting the Germans and we will finish the job. But we must bear in mind that our allies will try to save the Germans and conspire with them. We will be merciless toward the Germans, but our allies will seek to treat them more leniently. This is why we, the Slavs, must be ready in case the Germans can get back on their feet and launch another attack against the Slavs.[73]

These views reflected the sentiments of all Russians living through the war, regardless of how they felt about their own communist regime. When Stalin refused to relinquish eastern Poland and Bessarabia after the war, when he rejected any consideration for the independence of the Baltic states, when he negotiated tenaciously at the Yalta Conference for a Polish government composed mainly of communists, when he sought to install and maintain friendly governments on the Soviet periphery, when he demanded the bulk of German reparation payments for the U.S.S.R., when he raised the question of having postwar bases in the Turkish Straits, when he delayed withdrawing Soviet troops from northern Iran, he was acting like a Russian tsar, seeking every opportunity to enhance the security and power of his country. Few Russians disputed the desirability of these goals, after the hardships and cruelties they had just suffered. "If ever a state had good reason to want to rule over Europe," comments the political scientist John Mearsheimer, "it was the Soviet Union in 1945. It had been invaded twice by Germany over a thirty-year period, and each time Germany made its victim pay an enormous blood price. No responsible Soviet leader would have passed up an opportunity to be Europe's hegemon in the wake of World War II."[74]

Stalin expected the Americans and the British to understand and to accommodate these security needs. In return, he was willing to acknowledge some of the compelling imperatives of his Western partners. He was willing to join the war against Japan and ensure its defeat, thereby helping Roosevelt minimize the loss of American lives while gaining strategic territory, ports, and railroads to serve the interests of the Soviet Union. Stalin was also willing to control the forces of revolution, so far as he could. In the civil war in China between the Nationalists and Communists, for example, he was willing to

deal with the Nationalists and withhold recognition from the Communists. He was willing to tell communists in Greece, France, and Italy to desist from efforts to seize power even when conditions were arguably most propitious. Overall, he calibrated the forces of revolution spontaneously arising from the condition of depression, war, and liberation so as to serve the security requirements and national self-interest of Soviet Russia. "Stalin," writes Georgi Arbatov, a leading foreign-policy apparatchik in the Soviet regime, "manipulated internationalism to serve nationalism and imperial ambitions."[75]

Many of these points came up with T. V. Soong, the Chinese Nationalist emissary who met with Stalin just before and just after the Potsdam Conference in July 1945. The intent was to iron out the terms of the secret Yalta protocol about the Far East that Stalin and Roosevelt had negotiated. Soong wanted Stalin not only to repudiate the Chinese Communist Party but also to recognize China's sovereignty over Outer Mongolia and to admit partial Chinese control over the ports of Dairen, Port Arthur, and the major Manchurian railroads. The detailed, cryptic records we now have of these talks once again illuminate Stalin's overriding and persistent concern with security and frontiers. Japan, he warned, "will rise again like Germany." "We want an alliance with China to curb Japan." That nation, he elaborated several days later, "will not be ruined." After Versailles, "all thought Germany would not rise. 15–20 years, she recovered. Same would happen with Japan even if she is put on her knees."[76]

Though in comparison to the quest for security, the lure of revolution was secondary, the two were not always separable. In talks with Churchill in October 1944, Stalin had quickly assented to a percentage agreement that, in effect, gave the Soviet Union overwhelming influence in Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary in exchange for abandoning the Greek communists to their fate at the hands of their domestic conservative opponents and Great Britain, which actively supported the latter. As his armies marched through eastern Europe, Stalin signed armistice agreements and set up governments that would be friendly to the Soviet Union and that would ensure the safety of Soviet military lines of communication. He argued with Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta, insisting that the communist governing council he had set up in Lublin, Poland, constitute the majority in a Polish provisional government. Afterward, he acted ruthlessly to arrest, imprison, and kill selected Polish opponents. He unequivocally stated that the Soviet Union had to have a

friendly Poland that would not be a corridor for future invaders of the Soviet Union.

In Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary, which had been Germany's allies, he implemented a national front strategy, setting up broad coalition governments in which communists had important posts but were not yet dominant.[77] Under the terms of the armistice agreements that ended the war in eastern Europe, the Soviet Union had the right to form these provisional governments in behalf of the allied coalition, much as the British and Americans had done in 1943 in Italy. Soviet military commanders worked with local leaders to enhance communist strength and thwart noncommunist opponents. Stalin was willing to pay lip service to notions of free elections and self-determination, as he did at Yalta, but in practice he was determined to establish a sphere of influence that would safeguard the Soviet periphery for all time. "The Soviet dictator did not believe that a bourgeois government could be truly loyal and friendly to a socialist great power."[78]

In the spring of 1945, Stalin's armies launched their last offensive to reach Berlin and vanquish Nazi Germany. The fighting remained fierce. Casualties again were enormous. But the outcome was now inevitable, as British and American forces also attacked from the west. Hitler committed suicide. The Germans surrendered unconditionally. Soviet troops plundered and marauded. They raped, brutalized, and humiliated German women. Now was the time to even scores. Now was the time for Russian soldiers to restore their manhood, to overcome their sense of impotence arising from the Nazis' barbarous treatment of their wives, mothers, fathers, and children. Now was the time for the Germans to pay for their racial arrogance and ruthless exploitation. Within a few weeks, almost a hundred thousand Berlin women sought medical attention for rape. And the lamentations of German women, young and old, were poignant:

At home and still not at home,
The Russians come every night
Dear God I beg you
Let me sleep and forget
Forget . . .
Shamed, humiliated, and besmirched
I get up again with new wounds

Forget . . .
Is a woman there only to be stepped on—enslaved?
Doesn't anyone ask about simple right?
Forget . . .
. . .
I beg you God let me sleep and forget
And don't measure my life by what happens here.[79]

Stalin was measuring his life by what happened in Berlin. And he would neither forget nor forgive. This was his defining moment. Victor over the Germans. Savior of the revolution. Tsar of the Soviet peoples. Master of the Kremlin. Arbiter of the fate of countries. Dictator of the proletariat.

At 2:00 a.m., on 9 May 1945, victory over Germany was announced on Moscow radio. People, thinly dressed, poured out of their houses and along the streets toward Red Square. "It was an extraordinary day, both in its joy and in its sadness," recalled Ilya Ehrenburg. An elderly woman walked along with a photograph, showing everyone her son who had died in battle. "She wept and smiled." Young people rejoiced. Strangers embraced. The war and the suffering had bred bonds and kindled hopes. "With everybody else," Ehrenburg continued, "I grieved, I despaired, I hated, I loved."[80]

All day long, throngs gathered in the streets. In front of the American embassy they shouted, "Hurrah for Roosevelt." The joy was "indescribable," wrote an American diplomat.[81] In the evening, two or three million people gathered in Red Square to hear Stalin's words. He began not with "brothers and sisters," as he had on 3 July 1941, but with "Men and Women compatriots." "Its lack of warmth" impressed Ehrenburg, sensitive poet and writer. But people did not care. Their country had triumphed. Stalin was their hero. "Every word" he spoke "was convincing." The "salvoes of a thousand guns sounded like an Amen."[82]

Stalin was at the pinnacle of his career. He reigned supreme in the Kremlin. His authority was unquestioned. So great was his power, so vast the orchestrated tributes, that he disdained parades and dismissed public adulation. He dressed modestly, acted modestly. He had aged under the strain of war. He was sixty-seven now, short and increasingly stocky, with visibly thinning hair and a sallow, pockmarked face. He no longer was the militant, aggressive revolutionary; he had learned over time to listen, to withhold

his thoughts, to speak clearly and succinctly. With foreign leaders, such as Roosevelt and Churchill, he could be smiling, gracious, self-effacing; with subordinates, too, he could be convivial, warm, and generous. "Stalin," writes Sergo Beria, "was able to charm people. . . . He managed to give the people he was with the impression that Jupiter had come down from his Olympus for them. . . . He found subjects of conversation with everyone. . . . [H]e left each person he spoke to anxious to see him again, with a sense that there was now a bond that linked them forever."[83] Stalin spent more and more time at his dacha at Kuntsevo, worked late, slept late, and expected everyone to be available to him at all hours of the night. Often, he invited leading comrades in the Politburo for dinner. They ate lavishly; he did not. The alcohol flowed, but Stalin did not usually drink much. They talked politics, diplomacy, and affairs of state. They then gossiped, sang, watched films, and sometimes even danced. Stalin, the host, wanted joviality. He watched them carefully.[84]

Stalin's subordinates respected him and deferred, completely. He could be intimidating, humiliating, and murderous. The purges of high party comrades had ended during the war, but Stalin remained suspicious of everyone around him. They knew it and lived in dread. He monitored their lives. They dared not meet privately in large groups. They dared not travel together except with his permission. They dared not entertain Westerners. Lest this not suffice, to prevent cabals and preserve his ultimate right to decide affairs of state, he consciously set them against one another by establishing overlapping, competing jurisdictions. He created parallel instruments of governance in the party and government, each of which was monitored by multiple security services, which in return reported on one another.[85]

Stalin often remained inscrutable both to subordinates and to interlocutors. "He dominated his entourage by mystery," writes a recent biographer. "Everyone found it difficult to comprehend Stalin," writes another.[86] He could speak clearly, but what he was thinking was not clear. He could quote Lenin and Marx but in order to extrapolate different meanings, contrasting strategies, and divergent ends. Capitalists would founder, but the United States was strong. Capitalists would war against one another, but the Anglo-Americans were "closely connected." Crush the opposition (whoever they might be) but "make sure that the people are following you." Socialism is inevitable, but it might develop through the "parliamentary way."[87]

We can try to discern clear patterns in all of this, but that would be to misread Stalin. For him, there were certain constants, but never clear strategies. There would always be fear and suspicion, a lust for power and a craving for security. Ideology and experience dictated these constants. Lenin's texts were not necessary to clarify the truism that the world was a dangerous place—all Stalin had to do was look around him and see the legacy of war—but they explained why war had occurred. Capitalist dynamics generated conflict that could engulf and extinguish the socialist experiment. So might Germany and Japan when they recovered. So might domestic opponents. Threats abounded, and they were not phantom threats. As the historian Richard Overy has written:

> Soviet leaders were not living in a world of invented danger; they were fighting armed resistance on what was now Soviet soil, in areas where popular hostility to Soviet communism was widespread. Throughout the states liberated by the Red Army pro-Soviet forces were in the minority. The fragile control over these territories sharpened the conflict with the West, and provoked an almost constant state of alert against the threat of war and internal subversion. The hardening of Soviet attitudes to the West evident from 1946 onwards was a product of Soviet vulnerability as much as Soviet strength.[88]

Stalin pondered what to do. He did not want hostility with his erstwhile wartime partners. Sustaining the wartime coalition offered advantages: possible loans for reconstruction; possible reparations for rehabilitation; possible guarantees of security against a revival of German and Japanese power. While he disliked Churchill, he was upset by Roosevelt's death in April 1945. He had never let down his guard in dealing with them, knowing they were capitalist adversaries, but their interests and his had become intertwined and might remain so. On the morrow of victory, there was no anti-Americanism, nor would there be for many months.[89]

As Stalin headed off to the Potsdam Conference in mid-July 1945 to meet the new American president, Harry Truman, the future of international relations was still contingent. Truman thought he needed Stalin to help defeat Japan, and he needed Stalin to make a reality of Roosevelt's dream of a per-

manent peace based on the alliance forged in war. Stalin still believed he could get the Americans to accept his sphere of influence and abet his reconstruction. All three of the Allied powers thought they had a common interest in controlling the revival of German and Japanese power. Cooperation might be better than cold war.[90]