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THE POSTWAR WORLD

When at the end of the Second World War Soviet policy makers surveyed the world, they saw truly unprecedented opportunities for asserting their influence. Soviet victories against Germany, and the proud knowledge that it was they – the long-shunned lepers of Europe – who brought the Nazis to their knees, engendered a sense of entitlement, a sense that the Soviet Union had every right to reshape Europe in ways that would assure its security and elevate its status as the continent's sole great power.

This chapter revisits internal Soviet debates about the postwar world, finding a basic agreement among wartime planners in Moscow. They took it for granted that the Soviet Union would be Europe's preponderant power, even if Great Britain retained its position as the major offshore competitor. The United States was deemed remote. No one expected the Americans to stay in Europe. The world that was shaping up in 1945 was not all that different, in Moscow's plans, from earlier postwar settlements: it was an explicitly imperial world but also a world where contradictions between great powers could be settled on the basis of mutual acceptance of spheres of influence. The Soviet Union's position in this world ultimately rested on its impressive military power but it also depended on the acknowledgment by Great Britain and especially the United States.

It seemed at first that Stalin would achieve his aims. From his discussions with Churchill in Moscow in October 1944 (which led to the infamous percentages agreement) to the Yalta summit in February 1945, he initially seemed to be getting traction for a great-power concert, not unlike what Europe witnessed at the end of the Napoleonic wars. He was willing to make some concessions in the horse bargaining over the fate of Poland, Germany, and especially China, moderating his appetites in return for Western – especially American – indulgence.

THE POSTWAR PLANNERS

"The USSR must become so powerful," wrote Ivan Maisky in January 1944, "that it would not fear any aggression in Europe or in Asia; more than

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that – that no one power or a combination of powers in Europe or Asia would ever think up an intention like that."[1] Maisky had been Stalin's ambassador to the Court of St. James between 1932 until 1943, when he was recalled to Moscow and put in charge of the reparations commission. The mustachioed, affable survivor of Joseph Stalin's purges, Maisky had a well-deserved reputation of an Anglophile, which he shared with his long-time patron and former foreign minister, Maksim Litvinov.[2] Both Maisky and Litvinov were closely associated with interwar proposals for collective security, and both believed in the importance of postwar collaboration between the Big Three. But, as Maisky's comments suggest, any such collaboration required that the other two of the Big Three recognize the Soviet Union as Europe's greatest land power.

"What's most favorable for us," argued Maisky in a memorandum he sent to the senior leadership, "is a situation where postwar Europe has only one mighty land power – the USSR, and only one mighty sea power – England." The Soviet Union, he thought, should strive to obtain military bases in Bulgaria and Romania (which would then allow it to reign supreme in the Black Sea), and keep Poland, Hungary, and Turkey weak. The British would pragmatically embrace these changes. After all, Britain would be so weakened by war and so preoccupied with beating off the challenge of American imperialism that it would have every reason to seek accommodation with Moscow. Maisky believed that the British had more to fear from the United States (especially in the colonies) than from the Soviet Union.[3]

Litvinov concurred. In November 1944, in a bid to justify the need for postwar allied collaboration, Litvinov composed a whole treatise on Soviet–British relations, which, he hoped, Stalin would read. He went as far back as the eighteenth century, discussing in great depth what historians have come to call the "Great Game" – the imperial competition between Tsarist Russia and the British Empire. To what end? To argue that although the British and the Russians had long been engaged in rivalry – not least in Central Asia and the Near East – they were also able on occasion to moderate their differences through gentlemen's agreements. There was no reason something like that could not work again. London and Moscow could agree to respect each other's spheres of influence. The Soviet sphere, Litvinov opined, would include Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the Slavic countries of the Balkans, Romania, and even – oh, the appetites! – Sweden and Turkey.[4] The British sphere would extend to the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Portugal, and Greece. Litvinov also envisioned a "neutral sphere" in Europe, which would include Norway, Denmark, Germany, Austria, and Italy.

Litvinov, like Maisky, was recalled from an ambassadorial posting (his had been to Washington) to help plan for the postwar world. His Commission – aptly named the Commission on Peace Treaties and the Postwar Order – churned out memos that were then sent up the food chain to Litvinov's successor at the Foreign Ministry, Vyacheslav Molotov, and further up to Stalin. A lot has been made of the contrast between Litvinov and Molotov, one the proverbial Anglophile who kept President Roosevelt's photo on his desk and evaded arrest and death only thanks to Stalin's bizarre indulgence, the other – the dour Mr. No of Soviet foreign policy who had shaken hands with Hitler and whose signature graced the infamous Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact that carved up Eastern Europe and led directly to the outbreak of the Second World War. Their personal relationship was atrocious. But whether Litvinov represented an entirely different policy than Molotov and, indeed, Stalin is another question.

It is tempting to read too much into subsequent lamentations by Litvinov who was sidelined by 1945 and ousted in 1946 (Maisky fared no better: he was arrested and escaped death only because Stalin went first). People like Litvinov and Maisky, who had called for cooperation with the British and the Americans in 1945, were bound to be disappointed when the wartime alliance crashed. Litvinov blamed the ideologues and the rapacious land-grabbers like Stalin and Molotov, a view not unpopular among historians. As Jonathan Haslam put it, "the option of genuine inter-Allied collaboration had been dashed against the rocks of Kremlin paranoia. The only cooperation Stalin and Molotov envisaged was that which permitted the Soviet Union to grab all the territory that it sought …"[5]

Yet a close reading of Litvinov's and Maisky's memoranda reveals that their vision for the postwar world was every bit as exacting as Stalin's and probably reflected an elite consensus in Moscow.[6] Consider Litvinov's treatment of Germany. His general idea was to destroy Germany as a political unit by breaking it up into multiple pieces, and giving some away (to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Denmark, and the USSR itself) and setting up others as independent states. Some may complain, Litvinov allowed in one of his lengthy memoranda on the subject, that by cannibalizing Germany the postwar planners would merely repeat the mistakes of the Versailles settlement, feeding Berlin's bitterness and irredentism. But the problem with the settlement was not that it was too harsh on Germany but that it was too lenient, Litvinov wrote, arguing for "absolute necessity of weakening Germany in order to prevent a new aggression on its part." (This passage was highlighted in Molotov's copy).[7]

Why was Litvinov so keen on dividing Germany instead of keeping it united but under Allied control? It was because he worried that Western powers would eventually allow for Germany's rearmament and reindustrialization, overruling Soviet objections.[8] An outright division seemed far more reliable.

Maisky highlighted similar concerns, tempering his hopeful prognosis for an Anglo-Soviet gentlemen's agreement with realist warnings that in the longer term the Americans could create "serious difficulties" for the USSR by building up Germany and Japan, by "hammering together an anti-Soviet bloc in Europe" or, indeed, by forming an anti-Soviet alliance with China.[9] Both Litvinov and Maisky appeared much more in favor of dividing Germany that Stalin himself ultimately was.[10]

There were contradictions in Litvinov's treatment of other European states. He repeatedly argued that the Soviets had to make sure that postwar Poland would have a "government friendly towards us."[11] But, given the history of anti-Russian and anti-Soviet sentiments in Poland, how could it ever have a "friendly" government except one that would be subservient to the USSR? Litvinov argued for assuring Soviet control of the Black Sea and the Turkish Straits but doubted that this could be achieved in partnership with Turkey except "in case of close friendly relations between the two countries." Assuming that such closeness would be out of reach, he suggested that control be handed over to an international control commission made up of Black Sea states but only "under the condition of sufficient strengthening of our influence in Romania and Bulgaria." "In this case," he argued, "we would control three-quarters of the votes in the control commission" (with Turkey always outvoted).[12] During a discussion on Romania in his commission, Litvinov sided with some of his more militant colleagues in arguing for its partition (by setting up Transylvania as an independent state) because this would make Romania "dependent" on the USSR.[13]

As for the parts of Europe that were unlikely to come under direct Soviet military control – for example, France and Italy – there were serious debates between Litvinov and his critics, but these were not debates between the realists and the ideologues but, rather, between different kinds of realists. The idea – by no means an original one, for the British had long followed a similar policy in relation to Continental powers – was to prevent either France or Italy from gaining enough power to challenge the Soviet position in Europe. The key question here was whether restoring these to European prominence was in Soviet interest. Some (for example, Deputy Foreign Minister Solomon Lozovsky) thought so, citing the need to play a stronger France and Italy against Britain and the United States. Others

deemed such a plan unrealistic: Who could guarantee that these would be open to such manipulation, instead of siding with the British and the Americans against the Soviet Union?[14]

Litvinov was among the skeptics. He foresaw that the French, in particular, would be too dependent on their Western allies in the postwar world to offer an opening to the USSR. "One can foresee with great probability," he wrote to Molotov, "that France will play the role of a vassal of England or of the Anglo-American coalition." They had to "speak out against the return of France into the ranks of great powers." Echoing Maisky's views about the importance of keeping the Soviet Union as the sole great power of Europe, Litvinov warned Molotov: "We must not give anything away to France, especially nothing that we cannot [later] take back. Let her into the 'directorate' [this was a reference to the wartime 'Big Three'] and you won't be able to kick it out … We must treasure the advantageous position, which has come to us, that is: the position of the sole great continental power of Europe, and we must not voluntarily share this position with anyone else."[15]

Even as they called for Anglo-American–Soviet cooperation in the postwar world, the "anglophiles" were clear-eyed about the need to preserve Soviet control in Europe – whether through dismemberment, or through the establishment of "friendly" governments, or by preventing possible contenders from ever challenging Moscow's political preponderance. If this was the so-called "Litvinov alternative" to the Cold War, then it was not much of an alternative at all. Litvinov and Maisky preferred straightforward imperialism – for example, establishment of bases – as a means of assuring control. Nowhere did they call for communization of Eastern Europe. But neither did Stalin foresee the creation of Communist governments as the Second World War drew to a close. His preference was for assuring Soviet domination by propping up pliable, weak, but not necessarily Communist governments across Eastern Europe with a quiet British and American acquiescence. It was only upon discovering that such acquiescence would not be forthcoming that Stalin changed his tactics but that was not yet in the cards in 1944–45. The "Litvinov alternative" was everyone's preferred alternative.

These views were a part of a policy consensus, and it was a consensus that was based both on the lessons of the last two world wars and, more broadly, Russia's historical experience as a European and an imperial power. This experience was steeped in the good old tradition of land-grabbing, nation carving, and power balancing.

This is not to say that the ideological trope did not matter – of course it did. But the arguments that Litvinov and Maisky were the "realists"

whose efforts were ultimately derailed by the "ideologues" does not stand up to scrutiny. The former were equally skilled in the deployment of the ideological turns of phrase. Maisky, for example, argued that within fifty years – two generations – all of Europe could have undergone socialist revolutions, which would render his balancing prescriptions obsolete. Litvinov made the same point repeatedly, not least about France and Germany: if either of these had Communist revolutions in the foreseeable future, the entire Soviet postwar calculus would have to be revisited.[16] And here is what Maisky once had to say about the relationship between ideology and realism in Soviet foreign policy: "The Soviet government has never pursued and does not pursue *Gefühlspolitik* [emotional politics]. The Soviet government is utterly realistic in its foreign policy. When state interests and feelings collide, state interests always win."[17]

These wartime debates by Soviet diplomats highlight Moscow's core concerns in 1945. The cornerstone was Soviet security. This was understandable. The Soviet Union was emerging from an existential struggle with a powerful adversary. Partitions, annexations, control of straits and sea lanes, the establishment of military bases: all these pointed at attaining security in the sense that the entire foreign policy establishment – from Stalin and Molotov and down – understood security (i.e. territorial control). But there was also an implicit expectation that Soviet control over much of Continental Europe would be accepted if not welcomed by Great Britain and the United States. Such acceptance – recognition – of Soviet primacy would provide a legitimating aspect to exercise of raw power, and it was thus that security and legitimacy went hand-in-hand. Security was already there: the Soviets were already in control or about to gain control over large swathes of the European landmass. But what about legitimacy? As peace dawned, external legitimation was not yet a given but, as we shall now see, it seemed quite within grasp.

PERCENTAGES

There is a well-known story, recounted by Milovan Djilas, about Stalin's assessment of his allies near the war's end. "Churchill," Stalin allegedly said, "is the kind who, if you don't watch him, will slip a kopeck out of your pocket. Yes, a kopeck out of your pocket! By God, a kopeck out of your pocket! And Roosevelt? Roosevelt is not like that. He dips in his hand only for bigger coins."[18] Stalin, whose CV included armed bank robberies, was the least well placed of the Big Three to peddle moralistic takes. If anything, in the matter of slipping kopecks out of his allies' pockets, Stalin was

without equal. But even a company of pickpockets can agree to share the spoils and abide by the rules they set themselves. This willingness to compromise and to recognize that the other side had legitimate interests underpinned the famous encounter between Stalin and Churchill in October 1944, the encounter that resulted in what has become known to history as the "percentages agreement."

Churchill arrived in Moscow with the hope of delineating British and Soviet interests in Southeastern Europe. The prime minister's priorities were clear: maintaining British influence in Greece. He of course keenly realized that given the military success of the Communist-led Greek National Liberation Front (known as ELAS/EAM), and the potential Soviet support for the Greek Communists, the only thing that could prevent a Communist revolution in Greece was Stalin's voluntary abstinence. For this, Churchill was willing to give away a lot. To show just how much, he drew up what he called a "fairly dirty and crude document," a table, in fact, which spelled out percentages of Soviet and British influence in different Balkan states.[19]

The table purported to give the Soviet Union 90% of influence over Romania (with 10% reserved for "the others." The percentages were reversed in Greece (where, Britain "in accord with the USA" would keep a 90% stake). Yugoslavia and Hungary were split evenly, while the Soviet Union received 75% in Bulgaria (to the others' 25%). By the prime minister's later admission, he had simply forgotten about Albania. Churchill recounts what happened next: "There was a slight pause. Then he took his blue pencil and made a large tick upon it, and passed it back to us." Churchill continues: "After this there was a long silence. The penciled paper lay in the centre of the table. At length I said, 'Might it not be thought rather cynical if it seemed we had disposed of these issues, so fateful to millions of people, in such an offhand manner? Let us burn the paper.' 'No, you keep it,' said Stalin."[20]

The haggling over the percentages continued for the next two days between Molotov and the British foreign secretary, Anthony Eden, who had followed Churchill to Moscow. Molotov pressed for better terms in Bulgaria (90 to 10 in Soviet favor), and in Hungary (75 to 25). He also initially pressed for a slight advantage in Yugoslavia (60 to 40).[21] It seems that on the third day they settled on 80 to 20 for Bulgaria and Hungary and returned to an even split for Yugoslavia.[22]

How significant was this bizarre discussion in Moscow? It does provide a good example of brutal, cynical imperialism that Stalin and Churchill freely engaged in, but that Roosevelt would have found jarring and unacceptable (this is of course the reason why the Americans were deliberately

kept out of the loop). It is at least possible that by striking a deal with Stalin, Churchill allowed Greece – the one place that really mattered to him in the Balkans – to be saved from Communism.[23] Meanwhile, historian Geoffrey Roberts argues that the percentages agreement was not all that important after all. Stalin had never intended to support the Greek Communists, his argument goes. He realized that the country was of particular interest to the British and was willing to allow them the upper hand there in line with the envisioned division of Europe into Soviet and British spheres of influence.[24]

It is true that Stalin – siding with his own postwar planners who regarded Greece as lying well outside the Soviet sphere – had already resigned to yielding it to the British. There is even evidence that there were pragmatic military reasons for his reluctance to meddle in Greece: Stalin apparently thought that the Soviet Navy was too weak to attempt a take-over.[25] But even if Stalin gave up on Greece because he never intended to go there in the first place, he tried to present his reluctance as a concession, for which he sought a reciprocal British concession: a promise not to meddle in the Balkans. Stalin valued Churchill's recognition of Soviet gains because such a recognition conferred a sense of legitimacy to these gains, which they would not otherwise have had.

Yes, it was a secret, underhand deal with someone Stalin knew would slip a kopeck out of his pocket. Yes, it did not have American blessing (though Stalin had every reason to believe the Americans would resign themselves to the arrangement: neither he nor Churchill thought they would stay in Europe postwar). But it was an agreement, a quid pro quo, something Stalin valued, not because he could not act without one (he could) but because any gains obtained by force alone meant less to him than gains legitimized by the other great powers. In return, he was willing to recognize and accept their gains. It was this spirit of give-and-take that guided Stalin's thinking at the all-important conference of the Big Three that convened in Yalta, Crimea, in February 1945.

THE YALTA FRAMEWORK: GERMANY

The Allied conference at Yalta was the second time Stalin found himself in the merry company of Winston Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The last time the three had met was in November–December 1943 in Tehran. On that earlier occasion Stalin was squarely focused on pressing the Allies to open the second front in Europe. The outlines of the postwar world were as yet fuzzy and uncertain. Some of that fog was dispersed by Yalta. The Soviet Army had captured Warsaw. A vicious battle

was underway in Budapest; the Germans had dug in, but the outcome was hardly in doubt. By late January, the Soviets were already inside Germany proper, moving westward at breakneck speed. Meanwhile, beating back the Ardennes counteroffensive (Berlin's last major effort to change the course of the war in the West), the Allies now pressed the Germans along the entire Western Front. The Third Reich was on its last legs. It was under these highly auspicious circumstances that Stalin hosted Churchill and Roosevelt in the war-ravaged Crimea: auspicious because, as the key architect of the Allied victory, he knew that he could drive a hard bargain.

"There is a universally-known rule," Stalin postulated not long before he set off for Yalta: "if you cannot advance, then resort to defense, but once you have accumulated your strength, go on the offensive … In his time, Lenin did not dream of the correlation of forces that we have attained as a result of this war … Lenin never thought that you could be allied with one wing of the bourgeoisie and fight the other [wing]. We managed it." He added, echoing Maisky: "We are not guided by emotions but by reason, analysis, and calculation."[26]

Like Maisky (who followed Stalin to Crimea), the Soviet leader imagined a postwar Europe where the Soviet Union would play the predominant role. But in this he would not rely on force alone. Equally important was the Allied recognition of Soviet gains, because only such recognition would afford the Soviets a degree of legitimacy that Stalin so badly wanted. The purpose of Yalta was to give the Soviet leader exactly that: British and American recognition of the new postwar realities. Yalta would provide a durable framework that would ratify the underhand deal he and Churchill made in Moscow, a framework that Stalin hoped would allow him to make the Soviet Union both more secure and more legitimate as a world power second only to the United States in power and glory. As with Churchill the previous October, now, too, he was willing to make concessions – in fact, much greater concessions than required in view of the Soviet military preponderance in Europe – but Stalin also had red lines. The most important of these were Germany and Poland.

"I hate the Germans," Stalin once said. "But hate should not prevent us from evaluating the Germans objectively. The Germans are a great people … One cannot annihilate the Germans; they will remain." If they remained, then surely they would again pose a threat to Europe. When? In fifteen, twenty, twenty-five – at most thirty – years; that was Stalin's estimate. Some might say that it showed how the Soviet dictator was entrapped by ideological preconceptions. War was inevitable because capitalism made it so.[27] Yet it hardly required Marxism-Leninism to see Germany as a threat. A brief

Figure 1 Stalin and Molotov confer at Yalta, February 1945.
Source: Universal Images Group/Getty Images.

overview of recent European history would have sufficed. So, following the consensus of Soviet postwar planners and his own gut instincts, Stalin initially wanted Germany partitioned. This was a key item on his Yalta agenda, and he did not expect great difficulties. Who could speak up for Germany? Even Roosevelt was in a vengeful mood, telling Stalin at Yalta that he had become much more "bloodthirsty" towards the Germans, having witnessed their barbarity first-hand in war-torn Crimea. Earlier, in Tehran, Roosevelt had seemed determined to partition Germany. Stalin had good reasons to think that he and the president were on the same page.[28]

Yet Stalin found in Yalta that Roosevelt and Churchill were less keen to dismember Germany than he first expected.[29] The dismemberment can was kicked down the road. The matter was handed down to a London commission, which mulled the issue for weeks, before shelving it altogether. It is not entirely clear why Stalin – who had been so determined to carve up Germany into little fiefdoms – backed away from this goal in the spring of 1945. The likely rationale was his fear that most of these mini-Germanies

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would come under Western domination, whereas a larger Germany, where the Soviet Union, as one of the occupying powers, had a say, could have been maneuvered into some form of neutrality. This was a reversal of Litvinov's logic who, as we have seen feared the opposite: that a united Germany would inevitably come under Western domination.

The question of what Stalin wanted to do with Germany is important. Getting the answer right would go a long way towards pinning down the degree of his responsibility for the Cold War. But the evidence is sparse and contradictory.[30] Stalin's *later actions* (as we shall see in Chapter 3) do point to a misplaced expectation that he would eventually extend Soviet influence throughout all of Germany, relying on the Communists as a Trojan horse in a left-leaning coalition government.[31] But he was enough of a realist to know that a positive outcome could not be guaranteed. At least he hoped to exercise such a degree of influence that could prevent Germany from posing a threat to Soviet hegemony in Europe.[32] He also wanted to strip Germany bare of assets: it would pay, and pay dearly, and that, too, required that German unity be maintained, giving Moscow access to Germany's wealthier Western regions.

A united Germany was important for Soviet security. It was important for Soviet economic recovery. And it was important for anchoring the Soviet Union in the heart of Europe with tacit acceptance of the Allies.

THE YALTA FRAMEWORK: POLAND

There was also uncertainty in Stalin's approach to Poland. The overall goal was clear enough: to make sure that Poland would never again serve as a "corridor" for foreign invasion. But getting there was not straightforward. Stalin was determined to keep his ill-gotten gains from the 1939 Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact: eastern areas of Poland would stay Soviet; the Poles would have to be compensated in the West, at Germany's expense. That was not negotiable. Where Stalin did allow some haggling was the shape of the future government of independent Poland.

The issue had caused a lot of friction between him and the Allies, and the differences between Stalin on the one hand, and Churchill and Roosevelt on the other, became an early pointer to the Cold War. Stalin had good cards in his hands. In the fall of 1944, the Nazis brutally suppressed the Warsaw Uprising, led by the Home Army and coordinated by the London Poles. The Soviet forces were within a striking distance of Warsaw but did not enter the fray even as the Germans destroyed the Polish resistance. Stalin had no interest in recognizing the "London Poles" – the

Polish government-in-exile in London. He had his own Polish government, which was called the Polish Committee for National Liberation, but that Committee was unacceptable to Churchill and Roosevelt who, not unreasonably, viewed it as a product of Stalin's puppetry.

The question of the future composition of the Polish government was the thorniest issue in Stalin's relations with the Allies in the run-up to Yalta. The Soviet leader was willing to make at least notional concessions by striking a deal with the prime minister of the government-in-exile Stanisław Mikołajczyk. There was no love lost between Stalin and Mikołajczyk, especially not after the explosive (and accurate) allegations that the Soviets had massacred thousands of Polish officers in the Katyń forest had come to light. Nevertheless, with Churchill's prodding, Mikołajczyk travelled to Moscow in the summer of 1944, and then again later that fall, to negotiate with the Soviet Poles, and with the Soviets themselves, about the outlines of the future Polish government and Poland's frontiers.

The Soviet Poles offered Mikołajczyk the position of prime minister in a reconstituted government, and another three (of seventeen) ministerial posts, an offer he deemed too meagre to accept.[33] Instead, he asked Stalin to agree to a government based mostly on the one that already existed in London, with the addition of the Communists. Stalin was unsympathetic, and threatened that if his terms were refused, he would just carry on with the Communist government, and the London Poles would be left out of the loop. He also refused Mikołajczyk's plea to return parts of Poland the USSR had annexed in 1939, hinting darkly that if the Poles did not give up dreams of returning lost lands in the East, he may yield to the pressures of Russian nationalists who thought that all of Poland should belong to Russia as in the old days. "According to the Leninist ideology, all nations are equal," Stalin said, before cynically explaining to Mikołajczyk how moving Poland to the West helped resolve the national question for the Ukrainians and the Belorussians. It was a lesson in brutal *realpolitik* draped in the ideological guise.[34]

But there was a silver lining for Mikołajczyk. When on August 9, just before his departure, he wondered in passing whether Germany may become Communist after the war, Stalin set him straight: "Communism suits Germany about as much as a saddle suits a cow."[35] If Germany did not need Communism, perhaps Poland too would be spared the joy. This was not propaganda or deception. As the Soviet forces crossed over to Eastern Europe, Moscow issued instructions to the fronts: the existing economic and political systems were to be preserved; no sovietization was allowed.[36]

Only, there was a problem with the arrangement. Although there is no reason to believe that Stalin lied to Mikołajczyk when he promised that Poland be spared Communism, the Soviet dictator was dead set to keep that country under his control. That required excluding all manner of "reactionaries" from the Polish government, which could only be guaranteed if Stalin had the ultimate say. That excluded any sort of a genuine democracy for Poland. Stalin needed Mikołajczyk for window-dressing; more specifically, to legitimize that new government in the Western eyes. This was because Soviet control was made more secure through British and American recognition. If this meant courting Mikołajczyk, Stalin was willing to do that so long as he did not have to give the people he did not trust and could not control any real levers of power.

Mikołajczyk returned to Moscow in October 1944, just as Churchill was also there, negotiating spheres of influence with Stalin. Churchill helped arm-twist the Polish prime minister into acceding to Soviet territorial demands in the East. But the talks with the Soviet Poles once again ran aground over Mikołajczyk's unwillingness to accept the Committee as the preponderant force in postwar Poland.[37] Stalin was prepared to give Mikołajczyk one-third of government portfolios (including that of the prime minister) but the latter insisted on having one-half.[38] He missed the bus. Time was not on the side of the government-in-exile. On December 28, the Committee proclaimed a new provisional government of Poland. The Soviet Union recognized that government on January 5, 1945. "The Soviet government acted simply with Poland," Stalin boasted four days later. "It recognized the provisional government, without regard for England and America. Churchill swallowed this pill, but Roosevelt became despondent and is still sulking."[39]

By Yalta, then, the situation in Poland favored the Soviets. Yet Churchill and Roosevelt came prepared to defend their preference for postwar Poland, which would include a government where Mikołajczyk and other non-Communists were to play the leading roles. This was, Churchill told Stalin at Yalta, "a matter of honour for Great Britain." "For the Russians," Stalin retorted, "the question of Poland is not just a question of honour but also a question of security."[40] The Soviet dictator, knowing that he held all the cards, resisted all formulations that would take control from the hands of the Soviet-supported government. He ultimately agreed to have that government "reorganized" based on the one that already existed by including a few non-Communist personalities. His other major "concession" was to agree to hold "free and unfettered elections as soon as possible." Just how soon remained unclear. Stalin hinted to Roosevelt that

it might happen in a month's time (in reality, it took almost two years, and the elections were a complete fraud).

The wording on Poland is probably the most important reason why some historians have been so critical of the Yalta agreement. The Polish-American historian Jan Karski, for example, argued that "at Yalta, the Western leaders not only failed to secure Poland's rights, rightly or wrongly feeling unable to so, but they also indirectly, though not less effectively, sanctioned the Soviet position in Poland."[41] Largely because of Poland, Yalta has come to be regarded as a sell-out, which enabled Stalin to consolidate his sphere of influence in Eastern Europe behind the veneer of legitimacy. What makes Roosevelt's and Churchill's "sins" appear even more prominent in retrospect is the clear evidence that they both realized that there was no practical way of holding Stalin to account. The elections that he promised could never have been "free and unfettered," and the notion that a Soviet-friendly Poland could be anything but a Soviet-controlled Poland was just wishful thinking.

This understanding of Yalta is misguided. Of course, Stalin was going to impose his control on Poland. Not even the "anglophiles" like Litvinov and Maisky could have advised him otherwise. But that does not mean that he was determined to communize Poland. That came later, already when the raging Cold War rendered fence-sitting scenarios increasingly improbable. As historian Norman Naimark has convincingly demonstrated, Stalin never had any blueprints for "communizing" Europe. What he had was an understanding that friendly sentiments were not worth much without a measure of direct control.[42] How much direct control was possible without turning a country like Poland into an outright Soviet puppet? Stalin's calculations in the fall of 1944 indicate that he was willing to give Mikołajczyk a 30 percent stake in the government. His generosity diminished considerably in the following months, simply because he realized that he held all the winning cards.

But here is an interesting question: Why did Stalin even require the façade of a coalition government in Poland – or indeed elsewhere in Eastern Europe? Why did he try so hard at Yalta to have Roosevelt and Churchill "sanction," to use Karski's unkind word, his position in Poland? The reason is that he valued legitimacy as much as security. For him, lesser gains with greater legitimacy often trumped greater gains with lesser legitimacy. Even in Poland, where security was paramount, Stalin was at least making face-saving concessions, if only out of deference to the sensibilities (and the domestic difficulties) of his postwar partners. The broader Yalta framework was about delivering what Litvinov and Maisky had urged upon

Stalin, and what Churchill had seemed willing to grant in the percentages agreement: a stable and secure Soviet sphere of influence in Europe that benefited from being recognized as such by the powers that mattered the most, Great Britain and the United States. For this, Stalin was willing to make important concessions. But understanding this requires looking beyond Poland, Germany, or indeed even the entirety of Eastern Europe. The most telling example of the Yalta framework in action was Stalin's approach to China.

THE YALTA FRAMEWORK: CHINA

On November 7, 1944 – the twenty-seventh anniversary of the Soviet Revolution – a rebel force, fighting under the green banners of Islam, attacked the sleepy town of Ghulja (also known as Yining) in northwestern Xinjiang, China. The town's Chinese defenders were overwhelmed. On November 12, the rebel leader and the chief mullah of Ghulja, Ali Khan Töre proclaimed the establishment of a new government of the East Turkestan Republic: "Praise be to Allah for his manifold blessings!" thundered Ali Khan Töre's declaration. "Allah be praised! The aid of Allah has given us the heroism to overthrow the government of the oppressor Chinese."[43] Allah's help was of course important but even more important was the Soviet role in what became known as the Three Districts Revolution, a nationalist uprising of, predominantly, ethnic Uighurs and Kazakhs against the Chinese rule. The entire uprising, though certainly reflective of very real anti-Chinese sentiments of the local population, was nevertheless inspired, armed, and coordinated from Moscow.

Supporting the Uighurs and the Kazakhs against the Chinese was a new point of departure for Soviet policy. Until then, they had been doing the exact opposite. In fact, when in 1931–34 Xinjiang erupted in an ethnic anti-Chinese rebellion, the Soviets supported the Chinese government with weapons and instructors. That support helped Xinjiang's brutal overlord Sheng Shicai consolidate his control over the province. Sheng tirelessly tried to prove his loyalty to Moscow, so much so that he asked to join the Soviet Communist Party, proposed to sovietize Xinjiang, and at one point (in early 1941) he even pleaded with Stalin to annex the province outright.[44]

Stalin turned down these entreaties, although he could have supported the sovietization of Xinjiang, and could well have gotten away with the annexation, seeing that around the same time he annexed swathes of new territories in Eastern Europe, including parts of Poland and the Baltic trio. The fact that he did not do so despite Xinjiang's strategic and economic

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importance shows that he was perfectly content with a more limited Soviet role, so long as Governor Sheng retained his "friendly" disposition. (As a special favor, Stalin agreed in the end to give Sheng Shicai his membership in the Soviet Communist Party, thus strengthening Soviet control while maintaining the appearance of respecting China's sovereignty).

Xinjiang was only one but not *the* only one method of Stalin's imperial control in Inner Asia. Stalin's annexation of Tuva in 1944 showed that he was not averse to annexation if circumstances were right. He kept Outer Mongolia (then still *de jure* a part of China) under Soviet control but nominally independent. It was, however, thoroughly sovietized. Xinjiang was yet another model: China's sovereignty was respected on paper. The actual Soviet control on the ground was pervasive. But Xinjiang did not become Communist. There was one more model – that of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), based in the remote hills of Yan'an. Here Stalin exercised ideological influence (CCP was subordinated to Moscow through the Communist International – Comintern), and this influence he could on occasion translate into outright pressure (as when in 1936 he pressured Mao Zedong into a united front with Chiang Kai-shek's Guomindang). But overall Stalin's footprint in Yan'an was modest. Such a diverse portfolio of approaches allowed him to guarantee Soviet security (for example, by maintaining a military force in Mongolia), obtain access to important resources (for example, oil, tin, and tungsten in Xinjiang) and keep China fighting in the war against Japan. In some ways this nuanced strategy was a precursor to the wide variety of policies Stalin later tried in Europe.

Sheng Shicai upset Stalin's strategy by turning against him after the German attack on the USSR. He evidently counted on Moscow's imminent collapse and sought to rebuild bridges to Chiang Kai-shek by putting pressure on the Soviets. Stalin retaliated. On May 4, 1943, barely three months after Stalingrad, the Soviet Politburo secretly resolved to "provide support to non-Chinese nationalities of Xinjiang" in their "struggle against [Sheng Shicai's] and Xinjiang government's colonial-oppressive policy."[45] This support included weapons, even airplanes, as well as personnel. On December 5, 1944, the powerful People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD), established a special operations department responsible for the general coordination of the Xinjiang uprising.[46] By the time of Yalta, the Soviet-directed rebels captured control across much of the Yili district (surrounding the town of Ghulja), and their offensive continued in the following months. China's loss of entire Xinjiang, and the establishment here of an ethnic state controlled by Moscow now seemed like a distinct possibility.

But Yalta introduced a change of plans. Roosevelt had come to the summit determined to convince Stalin to join the war against Japan. Unbeknownst to the American president, Stalin himself was itching to join the action despite the existence of a neutrality pact between the USSR and Japan. But that did not prevent him from attaching a hefty price tag to his participation. Stalin wanted territorial adjustments in the Far East (annexation of Southern Sakhalin and the Kurile islands, which would effectively turn the Okhotsk Sea into a Soviet lake). He proposed a "status quo" for Mongolia, which sounded innocuous enough, though what Stalin really meant was formalizing Mongolia's independence from China. He also wanted his "priority interests" in Manchuria to be guaranteed. These included a naval base at Lüshun, known to Russians as Port Arthur (at the tip of the Liaodong peninsula), the nearby large trade port of Dalian, and Soviet control of a railroad that cut across Manchuria, connecting Liaodong to the USSR.

All these things Roosevelt was willing to give away without much of a fuss. It was "just language," he told the US ambassador in Moscow, W. Averell Harriman, who questioned some of Stalin's formulations.[47] As many of the issues discussed and decided at Yalta directly concerned China (which was not represented), Roosevelt cynically agreed to "take measures" to assure Chiang Kai-shek's agreement. Churchill (who was not present at the private talk conversation between Stalin and Roosevelt) pragmatically endorsed their secret deal.[48]

The secret agreement included a clause about a treaty of alliance between China and the USSR (it would ratify all the gains that Stalin had been promised at Yalta). Chiang Kai-shek was outraged. "I did not recognize the Yalta [decisions]," he fumed in his diary. "I did not participate. I have no responsibility [for the decisions]. Why should I carry [them] out? They [the Allies] really see China as their vassal."[49] But Chiang swallowed his pride and sent the head of the Executive Yuan, T.V. Soong (Song Ziwen), alongside his own son, Chiang Ching-kuo, to Moscow to negotiate the treaty. Stalin laid down his conditions in his very first meeting with Soong and the younger Chiang. Mongolia had to be let go of, he said, because it was strategically important to the Soviet Union. Stalin's privileges in Manchuria were to last for forty to forty-five years. All of Stalin's demands were humiliating but it was the Mongolian issue that proved most painful for the Chinese. Soong resisted but Stalin's pressure was relentless. At one point he even threatened the Chinese with Mongolian irredentism. It was not an idle threat: the Mongolian leader Khorloogiin Choibalsan was aware of the opportunities offered by the Second World

War endgame in northern China, and he was quietly lobbying Stalin to allow him to extend Mongolia all the way to the Great Wall and the Pacific seaboard![50]

Stalin dangled a carrot, too: China's unity. Already in May 1945 he claimed (in a conversation with the Americans) that he would "help China gather its lands" and that in his opinion Chiang Kai-shek was "China's best leader."[51] Now he promised political support to the Guomindang and told Soong that he did not believe in the success of the Communist project in China. "Good patriots," he said, speaking of the Chinese Communist Party, adding: "as to communists, question mark."[52] The Chinese premier begged for a delay, contacting Chiang Kai-shek for instructions. Chiang was in a bind. An armed insurrection raged in Xinjiang with Soviet support. Who could tell what would happen in Manchuria after the Soviets joined the war and sent their forces pouring across the border? And then there was the deeply distressing problem of the Chinese Communist Party, a "disease of the heart," as Chiang had once memorably referred to it: if Stalin sided with Mao, all bets were off. As against this, relinquishing Mongolia, as painful as it was, was a price worth paying. As Chiang wrote in his diary on July 5, "If [I] do not satisfy this demand of [Stalin's], it will be completely impossible to negotiate about any [Chinese] administration in Manchuria and Xinjiang; the question of the Communist Party is even more difficult to resolve. Moreover, Outer Mongolia has already been occupied by the Russians; courting true misfortunes for the sake of undeserved glory is not at all the way of statesmanship."[53]

Chiang's concession paved the way to a deal. On August 14, after more than a month of negotiating (with a break in the middle, when Stalin left Moscow for the Big Three summit in Potsdam), China and the Soviet Union concluded their Treaty of Alliance. Stalin got Mongolia, as well as his Manchurian railroad, his naval base, and his port after what was one of the most humiliating diplomatic negotiations in China's modern history. But he also reciprocated Chiang's concessions with a written (albeit secret) commitment to only support the national government (not the Chinese Communist Party), to respect China's sovereignty in Manchuria (and withdraw Soviet forces at most three months after Japan's capitulation), and not to meddle in Xinjiang.[54] At Soong's insistence, he even agreed to delete the wording about supporting China's democratization (i.e. the idea that the Guomindang should relax its iron grip by allowing others, in particular, the Communists, a role in politics). "Probably, the Chinese Communists will scold the Soviet government," he grumbled, "for agreeing to aforementioned points."[55]

Were Stalin's concessions worth the paper they were written on? Yes, and this is exemplified by his approach to the Chinese Communist Party. Needless to say, Mao Zedong and his comrades in Yan'an were not consulted during the treaty negotiations. Unlike Mongolia's Marshal Choibalsan who was at least called to Moscow while Stalin discussed the fate of his country with T.V. Soong, Mao remained in Yan'an, unaware of the promises Stalin was making. In April 1945, the CCP opened its Seventh Party Congress, where Mao delivered a report, promising the abolition of the Guomindang "one-party dictatorship" and the establishment of the "New Democracy."[56] Mao's immediate plans included rapid expansion of the "liberated areas," in effect, a civil war. But just a few days after the Sino-Soviet Treaty was signed, and even before it was published in the newspapers, Stalin sent a cable to Mao, demanding that he travel to China's wartime capital, Chongqing, to meet Chiang Kai-shek and "come to terms with him."[57] "You must do everything possible," the Soviets urged Mao in a cable sent on August 19, "to avoid a civil war, to try to find an acceptable platform for cooperation with Chiang Kai-shek's government."[58]

Mao discussed the situation during a meeting of the Politburo Standing Committee on August 23. "The Soviet Union is not a position to assist us," he said. Therefore, instead of going on a broad offensive, the order of the day was to talk peace. "We will continue to try to wash Chiang Kai-shek's face," Mao explained in his usual proverbial way – "but not to cut off his head."[59] Under pressure from Stalin, on August 28, Mao departed Yan'an for talks with Chiang. He feared for his life, and asked for guarantees. US Ambassador Patrick J. Hurley even flew to Yan'an to escort Mao who worried that Chiang might order his plane shot down. Mao's wife, Jiang Qing, is said to have sobbed at the sight of his departure. Indeed, Mao himself looked "as if he was going to his execution."[60]

Even though he obliged Stalin by going to Chongqing to speak with Chiang, Mao arranged for a fallback option: he ordered Chinese Communist troops to infiltrate Soviet-held Manchuria as soon as possible to preempt Chiang's move in the same direction. His hope was that the Soviets – although in principle committed to handing over Manchuria to the Guomindang – would turn a blind eye to Communist presence. Later in the year, these Communist forces caused the Soviets a serious headache when they clashed with Chiang's armies moving north into Manchuria. Chiang suspected Stalin of covertly aiding the Communists and even sent his son, Chiang Ching-kuo, to persuade the Soviet dictator to back off and stick to the Sino-Soviet agreement. In meetings with the younger Chiang Stalin professed his innocence, claiming the CCP were just doing their own

thing, ignoring his well-meaning advice. The Soviet government, he told Chiang, "is not happy with their [the CCP's] behavior."[61]

Knowing what we do of Stalin, it is easy to dismiss such comments as duplicity but in this case his protests may well have been mostly genuine. We know that from his reaction to reports that suggested that the Communist forces were trying to take over Manchurian towns, including the all-important stronghold of Changchun. In a telegram to the Soviet military command in Manchuria on November 16, 1945, Stalin ordered that "when so-called Communist detachments approach to capture Changchun, Mukden [Shenyang] and other localities, chase them away by force, do not allow them into these localities." He added the reason, too: "Keep in mind that these detachments want to drag us into a conflict with the U.S., which must not be allowed."[62] A few days prior to that he ordered Soviet communications officers and other staff out of the CCP holdout in Yan'an and other areas controlled by "Mao-Ze-Du" (Stalin's misspelling). He gave his reasons: "The civil war in China is taking on a serious character and I am worried that our people in these areas – who are not in charge of anything – will then be declared by our enemies to be the organizers of a civil war in China."[63]

Meanwhile, keeping his promise to Chiang not to meddle in Xinjiang, Stalin effectively pulled the plug on the ethnic insurgency, which he had supported for months. On September 15, 1945 – a month after the Sino-Soviet Treaty – the Soviet Politburo resolved to "mediate" between the insurgents and the Chinese government. The Soviet ambassador in China, Apollon Petrov, was instructed to tell the Chinese that the Soviets had been approached by some Muslims "who call themselves representatives of rebels in Xinjiang." These people "hinted" at the desirability of peace talks with the Chinese government.[64]

This was a completely made-up pretext. There were no such "representatives." In fact, the government of the self-proclaimed East Turkestan Republic was determined to keep fighting. In a letter to "kind," "people-loving," "his serene highness" Stalin, in October 1945 the chairman of that government Ali Khan Töre pleaded for continued Soviet support. The Chinese, he said, had treated Uighurs "like animals." "We the peoples of East Turkestan," the letter went on, "separated [from China] in such a way like water cannot be merged with fire, and how a sheep cannot live together with a wolf. We people of East Turkestan swore before God not to lay down our weapons until we reclaim our motherland and obtain full rights."[65] Before long, the Soviets withdrew all their forces (nearly 3,000 men) from the ranks of the rebels, and largely disarmed them.[66] They even tampered with the rebels' airplanes rendering them unusable.[67] Ali Khan

Töre was sidelined and more pliable representatives of the rebel force were ordered to proceed to Urumqi for peace talks, leading to an agreement (signed on January 2, 1946) that ended all aspirations for independence of the short-lived East Turkestan Republic.[68]

In other words, Stalin was flexible in pursuit of his interests, and his interests were not confined to mindless grabbing of territory. His drawn-out, painful negotiations with T.V. Soong demonstrated Stalin's remarkable attention to legal detail. He wanted his gains in China to be ratified and recognized, and not just by the Chinese but, via the comforting framework of the Yalta agreement, by the British and, most important of all, the Americans. For this, he was willing to make concessions, going even as far as abandoning certain gains he already had (e.g. in Xinjiang) or betraying ideological allies (e.g. the Chinese Communist Party).

CONCLUSION

Since its heyday in the 1960s and 1970s, Cold War revisionism – that blames the United States for the conflict – has fallen into disrepute. This was partly a result of the opening of the former Communist-bloc archives in the early 1990s. The new evidence showed that Stalin was as brutal as many have suspected he was, and more; that he was a master of deceit and manipulation; most importantly, that he was dead set on keeping his gains in Eastern Europe, even when that entailed breaking promises he had given Roosevelt and Churchill at Yalta. In short, the Cold War was inevitable because Stalin made it so. This was, in part, a question of ideology: it was not just that the Soviets were power-hungry but they were also guided by a set of principles – the Marxist-Leninist faith – that, in the long term, made coexistence with the West impossible. It was either us or them. The world would either fall to Communist domination or be saved through brave pursuit of containment. Stalin's two natures – imperialist and Marxist – fused in imperceptible and occasionally contradictory ways, leaving little scope to doubt his personal contribution to the Cold War. These historical narratives are a part of the broader public discourse on responsibility best summarized by Jeffrey Lewis: "there were three causes of the Cold War: Stalin, Stalin, and Stalin."[69]

On the other hand, there is also a substantial body of evidence, also explored in the recent historiography, that highlights Stalin's hopes for postwar great-power cooperation or at the very least suggests that Stalin had no plans for communization of Europe; that he was playing by ear; that, in other words, the Cold War was not inevitable.[70]

This chapter supports the view that Stalin was looking for a great bargain as the war neared its end. His vision was in Russia's *realpolitik* tradition and owed at least as much to the nineteenth-century's Concert of Europe as it did to Marxism-Leninism. Although the details of Stalin's vision are not particularly clear and are often obscured by his diplomatic guile and relatively sparse evidence reflective of his own thinking at this crucial historical turning point, the broader outlines can be discerned, especially in view of the extensive studies conducted by Litvinov's and Maisky's commissions in 1944–45. Of course, neither Litvinov nor Maisky spoke for the Soviet dictator, but they did write for him, and, to adopt Ian Kershaw's favorite phrase, *worked towards*, Stalin. It is indeed remarkable just how close their pronouncements collate with the occasional dark musings of the master of the Kremlin.

Stalin was a believer in power, but he knew that power alone would not suffice. That is why Yalta became so important. He knew that the Americans could endorse or reject his postwar claims. Even if he knew that his position in Europe and Asia rested, first and foremost, on Soviet military power, he wanted more than just power. He wanted legitimacy. In Crimea, he worked hard to achieve it, with Roosevelt's blessing. He could not have known that his treasured Yalta framework would prove so short-lived in the end.

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