

of principles and personalities, of circumstances and contingencies, causes their ideas to take root? It would be the height of arrogance for historians to condemn those who made history for not having availed themselves of histories yet to be written. Nightmares always *seem* real at the time—even if, in the clear light of dawn, a little ridiculous.

SEVEN

Ideology, Economics, and Alliance Solidarity

Some comrades . . . consider that the contradictions between the socialist camp and the capitalist camp are more acute than the contradictions among the capitalist countries; that the USA has brought the other capitalist countries sufficiently under its sway to be able to prevent them from going to war with one another. . . . These comrades are mistaken. They see the outward phenomena that come and go on the surface, but they do not see those profound forces which, although they are so far operating imperceptibly, will nevertheless determine the course of developments. . . . Would it not be truer to say that capitalist Britain, and, after her, capitalist France, will be compelled in the end to break from the embrace of the U.S.A. and enter into conflict with it in order to secure an independent position and, of course, high profits? Let us pass to the major vanquished countries, Germany (Western) and Japan. . . . To think that these countries will not try to get on their feet again, will not try to smash the U.S. 'regime,' and force their way to independent development, is to believe in miracles.

Joseph Stalin¹

After all, our friends may say to us, "Listen dear comrades, you are trying to teach us to build socialism, but you don't know how to raise potatoes in your own country, you cannot provide for the people, there is no cabbage in your capital."

Nikita Khrushchev²

THE victory of communism in Cuba—and the prospect that that triumph might repeat itself elsewhere in the "third world"—raised a specter of Western vulnerabilities so powerful that it would push the United States, during the early 1960s, into an ambitiously ill-conceived campaign somehow to "immunize" the modernization process in Asia, Africa, and Latin America against the possibility that Marxism-Leninism might infect it. The most visible result—at once foolish and tragic (but all the more tragic for being foolish)—was a protracted and costly military effort to save South Vietnam, the single greatest error the United States made in fighting the Cold War. Robert S.

McNamara, one of those chiefly responsible, has now admitted: "we were wrong, terribly wrong."³

What the Americans were wrong about was that as Vietnam went, so the rest of the "third world" would go. The idea that any single state could dominate so vast a region, or that its diverse inhabitants might embrace a single ideology, now seems one of the strangest artifacts of Cold War thinking.⁴ The post-Cold War era has revealed how durable national, cultural, ethnic, religious, and linguistic particularities really are; but that is only to acknowledge that they must have been present throughout the Cold War itself as they had been for decades, even centuries, preceding it. They ensured that the "third world" would find its own way whatever cold warriors in Washington or Moscow did.

When after years of devastating warfare South Vietnam finally did go communist, in 1975, it set an example only for its immediate neighbors, Laos and Cambodia. A much larger neighbor, China, had by then aligned itself with the United States against the Soviet Union: whatever their ideological differences, Richard Nixon and Mao Zedong found much in common in the realm of geopolitics. During the next few years Mao's successor Deng Xiaoping would revive capitalism within what remained only symbolically a Marxist-Leninist state; meanwhile the USSR, having stuck more faithfully to Marxist-Leninist principles, would sink slowly into economic stagnation and political fragmentation. By the mid-1990s market economies had taken root, not just in China, but also in a unified Vietnam and even a disunited former Soviet Union. Communism clung to power only in Cuba and North Korea.

This outcome was hardly predetermined, though; indeed, in 1945 it would have seemed highly unlikely. Capitalism had, after all, crashed badly during the 1930s and a great war quickly followed: had not Lenin predicted just such a result?⁵ Even Franklin D. Roosevelt and his advisers attributed the rise of fascism in Europe and of militarism in Japan to the breakdown in international economic cooperation that had accompanied the Great Depression.⁶ Americans and Russians could agree, at the end of World War II, that capitalism as practiced in the past was an unstable system, ill-suited to organizing the future. The Cold War had to do, at least in part, with the different solutions they devised to deal with this problem.⁷

The Americans, drawing on their domestic experiences, hoped to reform capitalism without ruining it. Progressivism under Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson, Republican corporatist associationalism during the 1920s, and F.D.R.'s New Deal all had sought to balance the competing claims of private property, open markets, and government regulation, albeit in distinctive ways and with divergent results. Meanwhile, in England, John Maynard Keynes was working out a theoretical basis for avoiding future depressions, and his ideas too found their way into Washington's wartime planning for the postwar era. As victory approached, though, there was no assurance that any of these approaches would restore and then sustain prosperity. It had taken Pearl Harbor to force Keynesian levels of spending on an administration as yet unprepared to accept Keynesian logic; and although the result was spectacular—a near-

doubling of gross national product within five years⁸—a highly abnormal situation had produced it. Even approximating such a performance in peacetime, much less extending it to a world devastated by war, would be a daunting task indeed.

The Soviet Union had constructed a radically different domestic system, based on the abolition of private property with the state controlling markets and commanding means of production: in 1945 its accomplishments seemed substantial. We tend today to remember the *costs* of forced industrialization in the USSR, both in lives lost and inefficiencies tolerated. But for anyone who lived through the depression and the war, there had to be much that was impressive about a government that had achieved full employment *before* it had gone on to defeat the most powerful state in Europe. Not even the United States had managed that. No wonder Stalin's methods, and the ideology that had inspired them, seemed to many around the world at least as applicable to the postwar era as did those of the United States.⁹

When, then, did the tide turn? At what point did the shift take place from the situation that existed at the end of World War II, when the future of capitalism itself seemed problematic, to the one that existed at the end of the Cold War, when Marxist-Leninists could look only to the enfeebled examples of Kim Il-sung and Fidel Castro? The process was of course a gradual one, but if there was a critical decade—there was never a single critical moment—it would have been the 1950s. For despite Khrushchev's noisy claims about capitalism's grandchildren living under communism it was during those years that conditions began to favor the western democracies over their Marxist-Leninist rivals. These not only ensured the survival of capitalism and the weakening of communism; they also eased American efforts to maintain formal alliances and project informal influence, with the result that even as Washington was worrying that it might someday lose the "third world," Moscow was well on the way to losing the "second."

What happened during the 1950s, to put it in Lenin's terms, was that the "internal contradictions" within his own ideology exceeded those of the one he had sought to overthrow. It became clear for the first time that the Soviet Union and its allies could maintain authoritarian leadership—a fundamental requirement in Marxist-Leninist states—only by means that ensured economic obsolescence. Reforms intended to restore competitiveness shattered authority, both internally and within the international communist movement. This was, it turned out, rather more than a contradiction: it was a fatal flaw.

I

Neither American nor Soviet leaders appear to have foreseen, during World War II, how incompatible their economic systems were going to be. The Russians, fighting literally for survival, lacked the time or the resources to focus on such

issues: all Soviet planning for postwar institutions seems improvised when contrasted with Stalin's precision in specifying postwar territorial requirements. The Americans, for their part, *preferred* thinking about structures instead of settlements. To do otherwise, they feared, might disrupt both the wartime alliance and domestic political bipartisanship.¹⁰ The international organizations the Americans designed were intended, without exception, to involve the Soviet Union as well as surviving capitalist states.¹¹ Among these was the so-called Bretton Woods system, the proposed mechanism for managing the peacetime international economy. One of that plan's chief architects, Assistant Treasury Secretary Harry Dexter White, explained the reasoning clearly enough: "You can't have a cannon on board ship that isn't tied down because [the Russians] can do a lot of damage if they are not in."¹²

Soviet representatives dutifully attended the July 1944 conference that established the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund but also—more important—set the principles that were to encourage postwar recovery. These included price stability through fixed exchange rates, reductions in barriers to international trade, and an integration of markets with government planning.¹³ The Russians may not have grasped the purpose of these guidelines—which was to salvage capitalism—nor do they appear to have given much thought to how their own command economy might relate to them. Their chief interest seems to have been the reconstruction loan the Americans were dangling before them as an inducement to participate, and perhaps also securing further acknowledgement of their country's status as a great power.¹⁴

From Moscow's perspective, anxiety over the future of capitalism had caused the Americans to raise the loan possibility in the first place: hence Molotov's curious offer on behalf of his government, some months later, to help the Americans ease *their* transition from war to peace by accepting a \$6 billion loan, to be used to purchase capital goods in the United States. "As a banker," Ambassador W. Averell Harriman later commented, "I've had many requests for loans but Molotov's was the strangest request I have ever received."¹⁵ Harriman was willing to "disregard the unconventional character of [Molotov's proposal] and . . . chalk it up to ignorance of normal business procedures and the strange ideas of the Russians on how to get the best trade."¹⁶ But the incident exposed a major gap in expectations.

The Americans, thinking as was their habit in multilateral terms, had sought to incorporate the Soviet Union within their plans for restructuring the postwar global economy. Isolating any part of it, they believed, would risk a return to the rivalries of the 1930s. Integration was the objective, not yet containment: common economic interests were supposed to overcome whatever geopolitical and ideological differences might arise. The Russians, thinking as was their habit in Marxist-Leninist terms, interpreted American behavior as reflecting self-doubt, not self-confidence; as an indication of how worried the Americans were about a postwar depression. Why else would they offer credits to rebuild a non-capitalist state? Both sides expected economics to shape politics, but they had very different ideas of how this was to happen.

What actually took place in 1945, of course, was the opposite: politics shaped economics. Accumulating Soviet-American disagreements over Eastern Europe diminished prospects for getting a Russian loan through Congress and, once the war ended, resurgent isolationism—manifested in a reluctance to make postwar financial commitments to anyone—meant that even a proposed loan to Great Britain was an uphill battle. Angered by the Truman administration's unnecessarily ungraceful termination of Lend-Lease, the Soviet government turned to the extraction of reparations from Germany and its former satellites as a primary source of reconstruction assistance.¹⁷ There remained, though, the Bretton Woods agreements, which prospective participants had to ratify by the end of the year.

We now know that as late as the final week of December 1945, Soviet trade and foreign ministry officials were recommending ratification on the grounds that this might yet yield reconstruction credits: "In the case of our non-participation . . . the USSR may become isolated . . . , which will affect the conditions of international credit in the postwar period."¹⁸ At the last minute, Stalin himself vetoed Soviet membership. A hurriedly revised foreign ministry memorandum noted that "as the government of the U.S.A. did not offer the USSR a credit, our membership in these organizations could be read as our weakness, as a forced step taken under the pressure of the U.S.A. Our negative attitude . . . would show our independent position in this matter." The Soviet Union might later join the Bretton Woods system "at the most convenient moment." But it could afford to wait until the Americans and their allies "take measures towards [an] additional invitation [to] the USSR to participate in these organizations."¹⁹

Casual though it was, Stalin's decision caused a strong reaction in Washington, where it seemed wholly inexplicable to those who had counted on a multilateral approach to postwar problems. Why should the Soviet Union flatly reject membership in such praiseworthy organizations as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, especially since their designers had gone out of their way to accommodate Soviet interests?²⁰ Kennan, then serving as *chargé d'affaires* in Moscow, recalls the State Department passing on to him, "in tones of bland innocence, the anguished cry of bewilderment that had floated over the roof of the White House from the Treasury Department to the other side. How did one explain such behavior on the part of the Soviet government? What lay behind it?"²¹

Seizing the occasion—"They had asked for it. Now, by God, they would have it."²²—Kennan fired back his famous 8,000-word "long telegram" of 22 February 1946. In it, he predicted that, whatever the official line, "Soviet policy will really be dominated by [the] pursuit of autarchy for [the] Soviet Union and Soviet-dominated adjacent areas taken together." The Russians were likely to turn "a cold official shoulder . . . to the principle of general economic collaboration among nations."²³ That conclusion was almost as shocking, in Washington at the time, as Kennan's larger argument that the Soviet Union could not be reasoned with, only contained. For Stalin's unexpected action forced American officials to abandon their vision of a postwar world organized according to

economic logic. It brought them face to face with the ideological and strategic realities of the Cold War.²⁴

The result was not an abandonment of Bretton Woods, only of its universalism. The Marshall Plan incorporated the ideas of unrestricted trade and open markets within the framework of containment, so that what had been a scheme for integrating the Soviet Union became a device for isolating it. The invitation to join the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund had been sincere; the one to participate in the Marshall Plan was only symbolic. The Soviet response was similar in both instances: initial interest when it looked as though reconstruction assistance might result, but then rejection when it became clear that involvement in the world economy would be the price.²⁵

It probably would not have made much difference if the Russians had joined one or both of these organizations. They surely would have pulled out as the incompatibility of Stalinist autarchy with Western multilateralism—to say nothing of the clash in political values that lay behind them—gradually emerged. “There was simply no middle ground between the two,” Martin Malia has noted: “One mode required a multiparty system and a market, whereas the other required a single Party and a command economy.”²⁶ Soviet participation could have delayed Washington’s efforts to get European reconstruction under way, though, and in this sense Stalin’s decision was short-sighted. So too was his failure to understand the long-term significance of what he had rejected.

For the Bretton Woods–Marshall Plan synthesis did more than anything else to ensure that the global economy did not again crash as it had in the 1930s; by the 1960s it was prospering as never before. To take a single example, world steel production increased from 106 million metric tons in 1947 to 265 in 1955 to 505 in 1965; but the American share of it *decreased* from 54% to 39% to 26% in those same years.²⁷ This is as good an indication of *world* economic recovery as any other and it was not Stalin’s autarchy that brought it about. Rather, as Henry R. Nau has explained:

The premise of freer trade ensured competition, especially for smaller countries; the premise of price stability ensured a stable environment for domestic investment and stable exchange rates for expanding trade; and the premise of flexible domestic economies ensured prompt adjustment to changing market conditions and comparative advantage.²⁸

What the Americans had devised, in short, was a lubrication system for global capitalism.²⁹

It would not last forever: during the late 1960s the United States would find its responsibilities as chief lubricator increasingly burdensome, and in 1971 the Nixon administration would allow a central feature of Bretton Woods—fixed exchange rates based on the dollar’s convertibility into gold—to collapse altogether.³⁰ By then, though, capitalism was largely lubricating itself, a fact made clear ironically enough by its resiliency in absorbing the “oil shocks” of 1973 and 1979. The main effect of Bretton Woods was to buy time and minimize friction, thereby allowing the emergence of a thriving international economy closely linked to one, but not both, of the Cold War superpowers.³¹

II

What did Stalin and those who advised him *think* was going to happen within the capitalist world? Why was he so confident that the Soviet system could remain apart from it and still prevail? What were capitalism’s “internal contradictions” supposed to be, and what benefits did the Russians expect to derive from them?

Stalin’s starting-point was the assumption that capitalist economies were mutually repulsive, not attractive. This was an old Leninist idea, based on the belief that capitalists by their nature sought above all else to gratify immediate economic interests. It followed that they could not cooperate for very long, and that the states they ran would sooner or later get into wars with one another. Imperial rivalries would be the most likely cause; these, Lenin insisted, had already produced World War I. “Thus, out of the universal ruin caused by the war a world-wide revolutionary crisis is arising which, however prolonged and arduous its stages may be, cannot end otherwise than in a proletarian revolution and its victory.”³²

From this, it was no great leap to Stalin’s belief in the inevitability of future wars. Capitalists would at first fight them but the Soviet Union would eventually be drawn in, overthrowing an old order fatally weakened by the capitalists’ own greedy belligerency. That had been the context for Stalin’s February 1946 “election” speech, in which he claimed that World War II had been no “casual occurrence,” rather “the inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of modern monopoly capitalism.”³³ Stalin’s thinking must also have influenced Soviet diplomatic reporting from London and Washington during and immediately after the war, which persistently stressed the likelihood of *Anglo-American* conflict.³⁴

These views, interestingly, did not go unchallenged in Moscow. The well-known—and, in retrospect, brave—Soviet economist Eugen Varga had been arguing since the 1930s that capitalist states were more capable of cooperating than Lenin’s model had allowed. As the USSR increased its influence in the post-war world, the United States and Great Britain would align their policies with one another, if only for self-preservation. American hegemony—the subordination of British interests to those of Washington—would probably result. But although Varga’s views circulated openly, Stalin never endorsed them and eventually forced their repudiation.³⁵

The Soviet leader’s final pronouncement on this subject, made in his 1952 book, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, showed no evidence of reconsideration, either in the light of Varga’s work or the actual course of events since the end of World War II. That cataclysm had occurred, Stalin reiterated, because “the struggle of the capitalist countries for markets and their desire to crush their competitors proved in practice to be stronger than the contradictions between the capitalist camp and the socialist camp.” It followed from this “that the inevitability of wars between capitalist countries remains in force.”³⁶

These ideas are remarkable for what they reveal of how ideology can obscure reality in authoritarian systems. They certainly confirm the doubts Kennan had raised in 1946 about the Soviet government's capacity for objective judgment: "who, if anyone, in this great land actually receives accurate and unbiased information about the outside world[?]"³⁷ But an even more interesting issue is why Stalin's diagnosis of the postwar situation did *not* turn out to be accurate. His understanding of what had caused World War II, after all, was not so far from that of top American officials at the time. What was different about the late 1940s that so confounded Soviet expectations?

First, it would seem, there was precisely the fact that World War II *had* occurred, and that American and British planners were determined to keep such a thing from ever happening again. The opportunity to redesign the international system was, in their minds, a "second chance," and both the United Nations and Bretton Woods reflected their determination to seize it.³⁸ Varga himself had noted the possibility that capitalists might learn from experience and evolve accordingly.³⁹ Stalin, conversely, fell into one of the most dangerous traps of theoretical analysis: the pretension to universalism across space and time. Like Marx, Lenin, and some American social scientists, he appears to have believed that theories can freeze history just as amber freezes flies. He ignored the possibilities of adaptation, whether inspired by intelligence, fear, or both at once.⁴⁰

Second, the situation at the end of World War II was no longer one in which capitalist powers balanced each other. Stalin had anticipated at least tripolarity: like many in the West, he failed to understand the extent of British decline, or of American ascendancy.⁴¹ Contradictions among capitalists might well have arisen if multipolarity had returned, but bipolarity was what developed: Stalin got his models wrong. Washington encountered less resistance from capitalists elsewhere than if there had been capitalists of roughly equal strength. The postwar era more closely resembled the *early* stages of imperialism, when a powerful center can control weak peripheries with little opposition, than the late imperialism of clashing centers and rebellious peripheries about which Lenin had written.⁴²

Third, the Americans surprised the Soviets—and probably themselves—by the way they used their disproportionate power. Their policies were, to be sure, self-serving: those of great states always are. Certainly they expected to benefit, as the British had before them, from leading the world toward an economic order its leading economy had designed.⁴³ What was unanticipated was Washington's willingness to subordinate economic to geopolitical objectives. In a pattern quite different from what Lenin had predicted, the United States sacrificed immediate economic gains to invest in long-term geopolitical stabilization.⁴⁴ The Marshall Plan reflected this approach: it was the peacetime extension of a wartime innovation, Lend-Lease, in which Washington had broadened traditional criteria for calculating profit and loss to include—or so it seemed at the time—the fate of western civilization. Analogous bookkeeping explains American efforts to promote European integration and Japanese rehabilitation:

the idea was to reconstitute independent centers of power that would balance the Soviet Union; but the price—willingly if not always wisely paid—was to create future economic competitors. It is too simple to say, then, that the United States consistently used its predominance to exploit other states. For it also *allowed its own exploitation* by opening its markets to the products of countries it considered geopolitically vital, even as it tolerated discrimination from them against its own.⁴⁵

Fourth, in seeking to reconstruct the postwar international economic order, the Americans proved remarkably adaptable. Apart from the most general principles of market capitalism they imposed no uniform blueprint; they were flexible as to both the format and the timing of economic integration. The Bretton Woods rules had accommodated Marxist command economies: the Soviet Union excluded itself from that system. Despite the fact that several of its European allies—notably Great Britain—had social democratic governments, the United States encouraged them to take the lead in planning European recovery. "Many of those Americans responsible for the Marshall Plan would actually have preferred socialist governments in the area," Tony Smith has pointed out, "thinking them particularly amenable to a fresh start in regional affairs and able to commit their governments more easily to planned schemes of integration."⁴⁶ General Douglas MacArthur was similarly ecumenical in occupied Japan, where he carefully preserved imperial prerogatives—Hirohito's and his own—even as he pushed vigorously for decartelization, labor unions, and land reform.⁴⁷ The result, in Western Europe and Japan, was a series of experiments that stretched the limits of capitalism beyond what Americans would have been prepared to accept at home.⁴⁸

Finally, in seeking to explain why capitalist contradictions failed to develop, it is important to remember that economics alone did not determine all that happened. The stark *geopolitical* reality of a Soviet presence in the middle of Europe and in Northeast Asia—a clear and present danger to the capitalist order that had existed only in *ideological* terms at the end of World War I—itself lubricated the efforts of capitalists to save themselves. It made the Americans more willing than in the 1920s to manage the world economy, and it made the West Europeans and the Japanese more receptive to American management. Once again, Varga had anticipated that the growth of Soviet power might provoke just such a response,⁴⁹ but Stalin never saw this. He was singularly insensitive to the possibility that he himself—objectively speaking—was capitalism's greatest ally.⁵⁰

There is no way to specify, with any precision, how critical the American role was in the rehabilitation of capitalism after World War II. Left to themselves, the Europeans and the Japanese might well have recovered on their own;⁵¹ had they done so, they would surely have reasserted their own authority within the global economy. Washington's postwar hegemony arose as much from their self-destructive prewar behavior as from anything the United States did to bring that preeminence about; it could not have been expected to last indefinitely.⁵² What worried the Europeans and the Japanese, though, was the prospect that

they might *not* be left to themselves: that in the absence of an American alternative, a Marxist-Leninist model of economic development might be forced upon them, either by the Soviet Union or—more likely—by their own desperation if there seemed to be no other way to overcome the effects of depression and war. That the Americans played no necessary role in securing the roots of postwar capitalism is, therefore, at best an unproven proposition.⁵³ Certainly this was not the view of those the Americans aided at the time.

It is possible to conceive of another alternative: a capitalist revival that might still have fulfilled Lenin's prophecy by giving rise to imperialist wars. Stalin had this prospect in mind when he warned that Germany and Japan might rise to their feet again, breaking out of "American bondage."⁵⁴ Capitalism's recovery without such conflicts was what really refuted Marxist-Leninist theory, and the American role here may have been more critical than in the salvaging of capitalism itself. To account for it, we will have to consider another lubricant the United States devised for the postwar international system: the diffusion of democratic culture.

III

Political scientists now regularly insist, not just as theory but almost as a law, that democracies do not fight one another.⁵⁵ If this view is correct, then as the number of democracies increases the likelihood of war should diminish. Historians, as is their habit, are more skeptical; but even they must acknowledge that the number of democracies more than doubled during the Cold War. By one count, there were twenty with a population over a million when it began and forty-eight at the time it ended—before the Soviet Union's collapse caused the number to rise well beyond that point. All of these were capitalist states in the sense that they allowed private property and market economies. None fought wars with one another while democratic institutions were functioning.⁵⁶ Did democracy itself, therefore, help to stabilize capitalism?

For all their wartime rhetoric about self-determination, the Americans had no plans to promote that objective comparable to their blueprints for collective security and economic recovery: the National Endowment for Democracy was a creation of Reagan's administration, not Truman's.⁵⁷ There were repeated instances in which the United States compromised and even corrupted democratic principles: the Yalta settlement on Eastern Europe and Northeast Asia; the covert manipulation of other countries' internal affairs; association with right-wing authoritarian regimes in much of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and parts of Europe; susceptibility to McCarthyism at home, with all its lingering after-effects. The ultimate violation of democracy may have been to rely so heavily on nuclear weapons as an instrument of deterrence, for this strategy came close to placing everyone in the world at the mercy of those few whose fingers—and minds—were on the trigger.⁵⁸

And yet—future historians will probably find it *more* difficult to disassociate the United States from the postwar expansion of democracy than from the revival of capitalism, which might have happened on its own. Resolving this paradox requires focusing not so much on the Americans' policies as on their practices: on how they behaved when given authority beyond their borders, and on the lessons those subjected to that authority drew from the experience. The clearest examples have to do with the German and Japanese military occupations, the management of NATO, and the movement toward European integration.

The strategy of containment, as Kennan and its other architects understood it, sought to prevent the Soviet Union from controlling defeated but still potentially dangerous enemies.⁵⁹ How this was to happen, though, was much less apparent. Destroying German and Japanese power altogether risked leaving vacuums Stalin would surely try to fill. Restoring it without removing authoritarian tendencies would avoid that prospect, but raise questions as to why the United States had fought the war in the first place. In the end, the Americans settled on a third course: reviving Germany and Japan while transforming those countries into democracies along the way.

This may have been the most successful of all United States initiatives during the Cold War, in that *democratization* proved to be such an effective method of *stabilization*.⁶⁰ But nobody in Washington planned it that way. No one ordered Clay, for example, to allow German press criticism of his policies, or to encourage their review by the American Civil Liberties Union: "I thought it was part and parcel of teaching the Germans the meaning of democracy."⁶¹ No one demanded that MacArthur push as vigorously as he did in Japan for universal suffrage, parliamentary democracy, and women's rights.⁶² Both generals promoted these and other democratic practices to set examples; both had the faith of missionaries that democracy, if introduced from the ground up, would root itself even in inhospitable terrain. All previous modern military occupations, MacArthur liked to argue, had generated as much resentment as they had alleviated.⁶³ It is revealing that he in particular—arguably one of the most authoritarian Americans of this century—should have seen in the construction of representative institutions a way to shatter that precedent.

Little in the history of either Germany or Japan suggested that this would be easy.⁶⁴ But Clay and MacArthur could see that what the Germans called a *Stunde Null* ("zero hour") mentality gripped both societies. Defeat had left a psychological vacuum from which there had emerged a social frontier. And one characteristic of frontiers is that new cultures injected into them can take hold in ways that replicate, with remarkable fidelity, even distant and alien origins.⁶⁵ The view from Germany and Japan in the summer of 1945 was not so different from what the Aztecs saw when Cortéz's ships appeared on the horizon in 1519: old institutions seemed suddenly useless, and conquerors took on the attributes of gods.⁶⁶

But the Aztecs in the end resisted. So too, although with equal lack of success, did those Germans who fell under Soviet occupation. Why did the West

Germans and the Japanese—for whom democratization was as sweeping a cultural transformation—not do so? Part of the answer, of course, was precisely the existence of a Soviet alternative: the fear of getting something worse. Part of it was surely the attraction of American wealth and the consumerism it generated.⁶⁷ Part of it was that the Americans found it difficult to treat their enemies brutally once they had surrendered: the pattern on the Soviet side was very different, and may well have reflected dissimilarities in domestic cultures as well as wartime experiences.⁶⁸ But part of the answer, too, has to do with why democracy is such a subversive ideology in the first place: it works, as does capitalism, by sharing stakes in its own success.

Obviously what happened in Germany and Japan does not fully explain why democracy spread so widely elsewhere after 1945. Decolonization—a quite separate process—also rooted democratic processes in new territories, especially in regions like India where the British had prepared the way. But the balance of world power was unlikely to tilt in one direction or another according to what took place in former colonial dependencies. Germany and Japan, because of their industrial-military potential, were pivotal: Kennan had recognized this when he made them the hinge-points of his strategy. What Clay and MacArthur discovered was that democratizing those countries could not only contain Soviet power but also undermine its justification. They opened up, for the Germans and the Japanese, a path to rapid economic development that did *not* require authoritarian politics. A great deal indeed hinged on the making of that point.

Washington's management of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization—and NATO's management of Washington—confirmed another proposition, which was that capitalist states could indeed cooperate. Leninist theory suggested the opposite, and even Kennan had worried that a permanent peacetime military alliance might tempt American leaders into an imperial pattern of behavior against which the Europeans and the American public would eventually rebel.⁶⁹ Had the United States tried to build NATO by bribing or bullying its members, something like this could well have happened. As Marc Trachtenberg has observed, though, “the politics of the alliance never really became a politics of mutual resentment.”⁷⁰ Just as the Germans and the Japanese chose not to overthrow the institutions their American occupiers had imposed upon them, so the NATO allies clung to their military relationship with the United States, even after the adversary that had inspired it had ceased to exist.

It is hard to see evidence of American *design* in all of this, for had it been left to Washington alone there might never have been such an alliance. Once European initiatives led to NATO's establishment, however, American *habits* became conspicuous within it. The Truman and Eisenhower administrations ran the alliance much as Clay and MacArthur had run occupied Germany and Japan: in ways that reflected democratic culture.

NATO was by no means a relationship of equals, any more than the individual states within the United States are equivalent in territory, population, or resources. But in both systems *power alone did not define relationships*. American

officials saw nothing strange in combining executive leadership with a careful acknowledgement of individual sovereignties; familiarity with federalism discouraged the view that strength could override the need for negotiation and compromise. Without stopping to consider that it might have been otherwise, Truman and Eisenhower handled NATO much as they did the Congress of the United States: by cutting deals instead of imposing will.⁷¹

It was not that the Americans lacked the capacity to force their allies into line. They had it and sometimes used it, most obviously against Great Britain in the wake of the 1956 Suez debacle.⁷² What is surprising is how rarely this happened; how much effort the United States put into persuading—quite often even deferring to—its NATO partners. Coercion clashed with what the Americans understood the alliance to be about: they thought of it as a *voluntary* form of association, like the Articles of Confederation and the Constitution of 1787.⁷³

Democracies also allow multiple constituencies to interact at multiple levels. Such systems are open, not just to the appeals their leaders make to one another, but to a wider and more cacophonous range of voices emanating from the public, the media, interest groups, even transnational organizations. These complicate the lives of policy-makers, to be sure. But they can also encourage new institutions—and new methods of consultation—to supplement traditional diplomacy. They enhance the possibility of sharing principles, not just balancing power. They create a buffer against bullying, smoothing out disparities of raw strength and providing recourse against the arrogance these can bring. They even parallel, in a way, the working of markets under capitalism: if the free exchange of commodities stabilizes economies, then surely the free exchange of ideas stabilizes democracies and the alliances they form with one another.⁷⁴

It follows that influence, in democratic alliances, flows in multiple directions: it does not simply reflect who has predominant power and who does not. To see this, we need only look at the extent to which the NATO allies shaped the alliance. In addition to having originated it, they certainly had a hand in determining which countries would enjoy American protection and what form it would take. Geographical logic would hardly have designated Italy an “Atlantic” power while Franco's Spain was not; nor would strategic logic have justified deploying large numbers of United States troops in highly exposed positions across central Europe.⁷⁵ Washington did, to be sure, insist on rearming the West Germans. But the French were able to sidetrack that process for four years by first proposing and then rejecting the European Defense Community; the British in the end came up with the formula that completed it.⁷⁶ Nor was NATO's “nuclearization” entirely imposed from Washington: the Europeans themselves chose this path when they rejected more conventional but costlier means for defending themselves.⁷⁷ The logic linking all of these decisions was that of politics: the *balancing* of competing interests within a system all had an interest in sustaining.

The Americans even allowed NATO's concerns to shape their policies outside that system. Objections from allies, as much as anything else, kept the United

States from escalating the Korean War after Chinese intervention.⁷⁸ Fears of a backlash within NATO discouraged Washington from pressing the French to end their debilitating colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria. Eisenhower gave Adenauer a veto over negotiations with Moscow on German reunification, even as he gave in to pressures from other NATO allies to meet the new Soviet leaders at the 1955 Geneva summit.⁷⁹ And surely Eisenhower's and Kennedy's responses to the alleged strategic missile "gap" of the late 1950s and early 1960s would make little sense without taking into account their hypersensitivity to NATO's interests.⁸⁰

The history of NATO, therefore, is largely one of compromise despite the pre-dominant position of the United States. But what impelled a superpower to allow smaller powers so much authority? Realist theory is no more useful than Leninist theory in answering this question, because it assumes that all states always to want to accumulate power. Democratic theory, however, provides a rationale for *diffusing* power to strengthen a shared purpose. The NATO treaty was widely viewed in 1949 as a departure from the old American principle of non-entanglement in European affairs: whether appropriately or not, the text most often cited was Washington's Farewell Address of 1796.⁸¹ But it may be that NATO functioned as well as it did because it drew on an even older set of American principles: the proper text here would have been the *Federalist Papers* of 1788.

The ultimate test for any system is its capacity for self-organization: it must sooner or later adapt, without external assistance, to the environment surrounding it.⁸² The United States led the way in democratizing Germany and Japan; and in NATO the West Europeans together with the Americans constructed a democratic alliance. European integration, though, resulted primarily from actions Europeans themselves took, building on these earlier initiatives. There had been talk since the end of the war of a "United States of Europe"—a favorite phrase of Churchill's that suggested more emulation than innovation—and certainly the Americans encouraged integration by making joint planning a prerequisite for Marshall Plan aid and by providing NATO's security guarantee. But there was no consensus in Washington on proceeding further, toward either a European federation or some form of European union with the United States.⁸³

It was at this point that the Europeans seized and never really relinquished the initiative. With the French and West German decision to establish the European Coal and Steel Community in 1950, a process of self-organization began that led directly to the founding of the European Economic Community, its subsequent emergence as the European Community, and now the European Union—with all of its shortcomings an acknowledged major power in the post-Cold War world.⁸⁴ At the same time and also with American protection, the Japanese were organizing their own quietly efficient emergence as an economic superpower. Together, these developments would create difficulties for the United States in the last three decades of the 20th century, although by no means as grave as those that afflicted the Marxist-Leninist world. The question

arises once again, then: is this what the Americans intended at the time the Cold War began?

They certainly did seek the emergence of *independent* centers of power in the postwar world: that was how containment was supposed to work. They certainly sought, at the same time, to *integrate* those centers economically, politically, and culturally: only that would prevent a return to the anarchy of the prewar era. "It may well be," John Foster Dulles wrote Harold Macmillan late in 1955,

that a six-nation [European] community will evolve protectionist tendencies. It may be that it will show a trend toward greater independence. In the long run, however, I cannot but feel that the resultant increased unity would bring in its wake greater responsibility and devotion to the common welfare of Western Europe.⁸⁵

Americans saw little contradiction in pursuing independence and integration simultaneously, because their own domestic system had long since achieved the most sustainable balance between these tendencies that the world had yet seen. To the extent that the Americans were imperialists, it was with a view to exporting that balancing act elsewhere in the world. If they lacked foresight, it was with respect to just how successful that enterprise would be. For Lenin, concerned as always with who exploited whom, such activities would surely have justified use of the term "imperial." But because not everyone else saw them that way, they did not produce the results Lenin had expected. Meanwhile, his own system was struggling with what turned out to be far more serious internal contradictions.

IV

We have already seen how Stalin replaced Lenin's vision of spontaneous proletarian uprisings taking place in the most advanced industrial countries with one that linked the progress of world revolution to the expanding territorial and geopolitical influence of the Soviet Union.⁸⁶ It involved imposing authoritarian politics and command economics on countries whose citizens were in no better position to question the process than were those of the USSR itself. This did not happen all at once, though, for we have also seen that until 1947 a fair amount of flexibility existed within Eastern Europe. It is therefore possible to say that Soviet power adapted itself, for a time, to local circumstances.

What distinguished Stalin's behavior from that of the Americans was this: when resistance began to arise within his sphere, he sought to smother it, not compromise with it. Tito's complaints about the Soviet-Yugoslav relationship were no more serious than those that arose routinely between London, Paris, and Washington: the British and the French frequently challenged American priorities with respect to the treatment of Germany, the terms of economic assistance, and the need for military protection. The Truman administration

responded by sticking to its position in some instances, but in others it permitted its European allies to reshape its policies.

Stalin was more consistent, which is to say less accommodating. Instead of negotiating with Tito, he declared him a heretic and did all he could—short of war—to overthrow him. At the same time he clamped down on whatever remnants of independent thought remained in Eastern Europe. Government and party leaders in that part of the world quickly learned what had long been clear inside the Soviet Union itself: that Stalin's idea of a dialogue with the "opposition," loyal or not, was a purge trial, followed by a quickly executed sentence. The last thing he wanted was *independent* centers of power in Europe or elsewhere; rather he sought to make them *dependent*. As he aged, the Soviet leader grew less and less prepared to wait for the inexorable forces of history to bring the workers of the world, by their own choice, into the Soviet camp.

This insistence on dependency shows up clearly in Stalin's attitude toward German reunification: he was for it *only* if Moscow could run the resulting state. His proposals for unity through neutrality, as in March 1952, do not appear to have been sincere; certainly Stalin was never as committed to this idea as Kennan and several of his State Department colleagues were to Program A.⁸⁷ Even more significant, the Soviet Union had no plans to ensure a peaceful Germany by enmeshing it, as the Americans and West Europeans ultimately chose to do, within a web of economic and military ties to its neighbors. Perhaps Stalin feared the Germans too much; perhaps he thought the East Europeans too weak; and in any event the need to control Germany provided a convenient excuse for continuing to dominate Eastern Europe. But for the Americans, the need to control Germany was an excellent reason for promoting an *independent*—albeit integrated—Western Europe.

Stalin believed in integration too, but of a different sort. He wanted the economies of Eastern Europe connected closely to the USSR, not to each another. Just as he ensured that communist parties there could communicate only through Moscow and not among themselves,⁸⁸ so he sought to extract benefits unilaterally from the countries within his sphere of influence without encouraging their economic cooperation. The result was to retard and perhaps even reverse modernization: one estimate suggests that the Soviets *took from* Eastern Europe—in the form of reparations and other removals for use in reconstruction—about as much as the Americans *put into* Western Europe through the Marshall Plan.⁸⁹ Stalin handled the communist regime in China in much the same way, demanding economic concessions while celebrating Mao Zedong's revolutionary credentials.⁹⁰ New evidence suggests that he even tried to make shipments of lead from North Korea the price for authorizing its attack on South Korea: "I hope that Kim Il Sung will not refuse us in this."⁹¹

What all of this suggests is that Stalin's plans for expanding the Soviet Union's influence beyond its borders contained a major contradiction. On the one hand, he clung to the notion, growing out of his belief in the instability of capitalism, that proletarians in other countries would eventually choose the socialist model: hence, his illusions with respect to Germany and Eastern

Europe at the end of the war as well as his euphoria when the Chinese unexpectedly did move in that direction. But on the other hand, Stalin's economic policies caused the Soviet presence in those regions to come across as exploitative, and this generated resentment among the very people whose loyalty he had hoped to win. The old dictator expected capitalists to forego long-term economic advantages for immediate and selfish gains; but he anticipated that communists would focus only on the long-term advantages that were to come from building a socialist order, overlooking the immediate sacrifices this involved. The reverse, we can now see, is what actually happened.

The Soviet Union, for this reason, never came close to building relationships based on a sense of *mutual* interest extending across all levels of society. Communist parties and government bureaucracies might see advantages in alignment with Moscow, but the people under them rarely did. This pattern contrasts strongly with the one in Western Europe and Japan, where the democratic process regularly returned governments that had supported association with Washington. Stalin's legacy, then, was to leave in place the structures for building a socialist order, but with no foundation of popular support.

His eventual successor, Nikita Khrushchev, worried a great deal about this. He understood clearly that unless socialism began to provide greater benefits, whatever support it had would disappear and its appeal where it did not yet exist would quickly fade. Proud of what the Soviet Union had accomplished within his lifetime, its new leader nonetheless lacked Stalin's confidence that the laws of history alone would secure its future. Khrushchev's single greatest priority was to humanize Marxism-Leninism, so that people would *want* to be associated with it. "If one does not show concern for the growth of material and spiritual wealth," he was still warning on the eve of his overthrow in 1964, "then people will listen today, they will listen tomorrow, and then they will say: 'Why do you always promise us everything in the future, talking, so to speak, about life beyond the grave? The priest has already talked to us about that.'"⁹²

There was reason for concern, at the time of Stalin's death, that a command economy might never provide sufficient benefits to win widespread support. In Western Europe, and particularly in West Germany, the Bretton Woods–Marshall Plan model had shown that market economies could not only prosper but sustain themselves by democratic means. Nothing like this had happened in Eastern Europe: indeed the June 1953 riots in East Berlin, where contrasts between the two systems had been so clear, suggested how easily unrest could spread elsewhere in Eastern Europe, perhaps even to the Soviet Union itself.⁹³ Khrushchev was determined to ward off that danger, to find some middle ground between the repression that was sure to generate further discontent, on one hand, and reforms that might create excessive expectations, on the other. The paths he chose, though, were no freer from contradictions than Stalin's had been.

Consider first the problem of authority, without which Khrushchev could do nothing at all. The post-Stalinist system provided no easy way to elicit agreement among government and party officials on what to do. Reform got

entangled with the struggle over succession, so that it was often necessary to eliminate rivals—as Khrushchev did Beria and Malenkov—before assessing the feasibility of their policies.⁹⁴ Stalin had used this technique to consolidate his own power after Lenin's death; but even then it had been a lengthy and cumbersome process. Because Khrushchev refrained from killing those who lost out—apart, of course, from Beria and later the Hungarian rebel Imre Nagy—he never evoked the fear that Stalin did.⁹⁵ His emergence as preeminent Soviet leader, then, failed to carry with it the automatic obedience of his subordinates; nor could he count on soliciting their advice without simultaneously encouraging their ambitions.

Then there was the task of managing reform. Khrushchev appears to have considered only a top-down method: he insisted that all improvements—even those in literature and the arts—result from central planning. In practice this often meant his own enthusiasms (or lack thereof). Some areas, such as housing and consumer goods, showed modest improvements. There was for a time an intellectual “thaw.” But in the all-important agricultural sector Khrushchev's policies failed miserably. The reason was his resistance to local experimentation; instead he insisted on experimenting with the entire country by imposing—and then frequently altering—uniform requirements with respect to crops, fertilizers, and the use of agricultural machinery.⁹⁶ In a state as large and diverse as the USSR this could hardly work, but as one of his biographers notes, “the failure of each successive scheme to achieve the promised miracles led Khrushchev merely to intensify his frantic search for a new cure-all.”⁹⁷ Only in retirement does he appear to have lost faith—and even then, not much—in the virtues of central planning.⁹⁸

To his credit, Khrushchev did seek to civilize Soviet society by eliminating Stalin's worst abuses. His reforms ranged from so small a matter as restoring normal working hours for top officials, who for years had had to adapt their schedules to that of their nocturnal boss, to abolishing indiscriminate arrests and releasing most of the surviving prisoners Stalin had dispatched to the GULAG.⁹⁹ Khrushchev even initiated the first investigations of Stalin's crimes: “It's inevitable that people will find out what happened,” he remembers arguing, “if they start asking us about it after we've kept silent, they'll already be sitting in judgment over us. . . . I'd rather we raised the matter ourselves.”¹⁰⁰ The obvious difficulty here, though, was how to disassociate himself and his colleagues—all of them products of Stalin's regime—from the discredited tyrant himself; or, to put it another way, how to preserve central direction of the party, the economy, and the state while scrapping the methods by which that direction had hitherto been accomplished. Self-criticism was not as easy for the Russians as for the Chinese, Khrushchev admitted to Zhou Enlai; were they to go too far, Zhou reported to Mao Zedong, “their current leadership would be in trouble.”¹⁰¹

Solidifying the international communist movement was yet another priority. Khrushchev acknowledged that Stalin had unnecessarily alienated the Yugoslavs, and he embarked on the delicate task of rebuilding relations with them without angering the Chinese, who still respected—even if they no longer

worshipped—his predecessor. The new Kremlin leader made his first trip to Beijing in October 1954, and followed it with one to Belgrade in May 1955. Neither went easily: the Chinese were inscrutable and Tito was smug. “[S]ome of the things Mao said put me on my guard,” Khrushchev recalls, while “the Yugoslav comrades smiled scornfully and made sarcastic remarks.”¹⁰² There were two larger problems here. Khrushchev could hardly repudiate Stalin's legacy without relinquishing the Soviet Communist Party's long-standing claim to infallibility. But that, in turn, left little justification for his own continued authority over communist parties elsewhere, a point upon which Mao and Tito—for all their other differences—could certainly agree. Khrushchev could not have both reform and revolutionary unity, and this too was a contradiction of some substance.

Finally, Khrushchev hoped to improve relations with the United States. Reform at home required cutting military expenditures, hence the need to relax tensions abroad. He therefore overrode objections from his inherited foreign minister, Molotov, and made the concessions necessary to conclude a long-stalled treaty ending the four-power occupation of Austria.¹⁰³ This gesture in turn paved the way for the first postwar summit—and Khrushchev's debut as a world statesman—at Geneva in July 1955.¹⁰⁴ But even this strategy contained contradictions. The Americans remained wary, seeing in Khrushchev's very flexibility a tactic that might lull the West into complacency, delaying German rearmament and the consolidation of NATO.¹⁰⁵ Even more significantly, Khrushchev's determination to reduce military spending led him to follow Eisenhower's example and rely increasingly on nuclear weapons—but with a difference. The American “new look” was a strategy of deterrence aimed at *maintaining* the status quo. Khrushchev found it all too tempting to try to use his nuclear capabilities to *alter* the status quo.¹⁰⁶ The result would be not to relax tensions, but to drive them to new heights.

Stalin's demise, therefore, did not remove the contradictions afflicting the Marxist-Leninist world; if anything, it multiplied them. The old dictator had been prepared to live with such strains: like Marx, Lenin, and Mao, he understood that contradictions within a structure can counter one another, providing those outside of it—or on top of it—a harsh means of control.¹⁰⁷ Khrushchev, more humane by temperament, hoped to *resolve* contradictions: the idea of continuing to live under conditions of permanent crisis was thoroughly repugnant to him.¹⁰⁸ As James Richter has noted, “he was brimming with confidence that the moral appeal of the Soviet Union's socialist system and its efforts for peace would soon turn the tide in the ideological struggle.”¹⁰⁹ The risk in Khrushchev's effort to remove contradictions, though—perhaps this was the greatest contradiction of all—was that of losing control.

V

The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, which convened in Moscow in February 1956, was the first since Stalin's death, and hence a crucial opportunity for Khrushchev: "we would have to prove that we were able to assume full responsibility for governing the Party and the country." It was his style, when confronting multiple problems, to try to solve as many of them as possible with a single dramatic stroke:¹¹⁰ on this occasion he would do so by exorcising the great ghost himself. "We arranged for a special closed session of the Congress, and I delivered my speech. The delegates listened in absolute silence. It was so quiet in the huge hall you could hear a fly buzzing."¹¹¹ "[T]he old patterns of thought [had] formed such a thick layer," Georgi Arbatov recalled years later, that when Khrushchev attacked Stalin it "came like a bolt out of the blue, shaking the Party and our whole society to its roots."¹¹²

Khrushchev made three points in his "secret" speech and in his other pronouncements at the Congress, each of them explosive. First, he acknowledged not just the fallibility of a system that had claimed infallibility, but its inhumanity as well: his condemnation of Stalin was an unprecedented admission by a regime still in power that it had committed massive crimes. Second, he repudiated the doctrine of inevitable conflict: contrary to what Stalin had taught (and Lenin had believed), the contradictions of capitalism need not produce a war, which meant that communism could prevail through "peaceful coexistence." Third, there was more than one way to achieve this victory: the Soviet Union would no longer tell communist parties elsewhere how to proceed, but would rather encourage their adaptations to local conditions.¹¹³ Khrushchev's objective in all of this was to liberate Marxism-Leninism from Stalin, its hijacker. Only then, he was convinced, could it thrive.

But what if the two could not be separated? What if Stalinism was the highest form of Marxism-Leninism? What if the latter could not function without at least elements of the former? What if, as Henry Kissinger has suggested, "[a]pprenticeship to Stalin had guaranteed psychological malformation," so that his heirs "made their nightmarish existence . . . tolerable [only] by a passionate belief in the system to which they owed their careers"?¹¹⁴ Like Mikhail Gorbachev three decades later, Khrushchev knew that years of stagnation had left grave difficulties, and he set about removing them in ways that would be at once forceful and humane.¹¹⁵ But because both men were incorrigible optimists, neither found it easy to accept what their predecessors had taken for granted: that the system survived only by *balancing* contradictions, and that resolving these might wreck it. Gorbachev would discover this about the Soviet Union itself. Khrushchev was spared that revelation, but not its implications for the unity of the Marxist-Leninist world.

De-Stalinization did for a time secure Khrushchev's position at home, but it severely weakened his authority over communism elsewhere. With the glaring

exception of Tito, Stalin had always managed to elicit the loyalty of communists outside the Soviet Union, whether through his prestige or his threats or both.¹¹⁶ No one could credibly challenge him as the world's preeminent Marxist-Leninist; he had repeatedly shown what could happen to whoever he suspected of harboring such aspirations. Stalin relied on terror but never the large-scale use of force—certainly not the Red Army—to bring recalcitrant comrades into line. It was generally enough to lift a finger, or raise an eyebrow, or sign a death warrant.

Khrushchev, in contrast, got much less respect. Always garrulous, often obsequious, at times bibulous, he never mastered those economies of gesture, speech, and presence that made Stalin seem so formidable.¹¹⁷ Having relinquished the instruments of terror by which his predecessor had built such a fearsome reputation, he then tried at the 20th Party Congress to disassociate himself from Stalin altogether. It was a brutal irony that these *departures* from Stalinism so quickly got Khrushchev into a position in which he felt he had to use force, at a level Stalin had never found necessary, to keep the communist world from coming apart.

Authoritarian states that attempt reform risk revolution: it is harder than in a constitutional system to find footing in between.¹¹⁸ Beria had discovered this, disastrously for himself, in East Germany in June 1953; Khrushchev at that time had thrown his support to Ulbricht and the forces of reaction.¹¹⁹ But three years later, having come out not only for reform but for multiple paths in achieving it, the new Kremlin leader confronted a similar situation in Poland.

The long-time Communist Party leader there, Boleslaw Bierut, had died shortly after the 20th Party Congress, and the Poles took advantage of those two events to begin releasing political prisoners and removing other Stalinists from the government. As if to justify these moves, they also saw to it that Khrushchev's "secret" speech did not remain so: with further help from Israeli and American intelligence, it appeared in the *New York Times* on 4 June.¹²⁰ A workers' strike, followed by riots, broke out later that month in Poznan, and by October pressures were building within the Polish Communist Party to bring to power an old and, in Moscow's view, unreliable victim of Stalin's anti-Titoist purges, Wladyslaw Gomulka.

Khrushchev now found himself in an awkward dilemma. His own endorsement of diversity among Marxist-Leninists would make it difficult to prevent the Poles from going ahead; but if they did, Gomulka's resentment against the Russians—sure to be shared by many of his countrymen—might leave the Soviet Union with a hostile power between it and an equally alarmed East Germany. Khrushchev's first instinct was to bully the Poles: in an act Stalin would never have considered, he flew uninvited to Warsaw on 19 October, the day the Polish party plenum was to elect Gomulka, and demanded admission to the meeting. "The treacherous activity . . . has become evident, this number won't pass here!" he bellowed at the airport—so loudly, the Polish record notes, that even the chauffeurs could hear. But then an astonishing thing happened. Gomulka talked back:

[I]f you talk with a revolver on the table you don't have an even-handed discussion. I cannot continue the discussion under these conditions. I am ill and I cannot fill such a function in my condition. We can listen to the complaints of the Soviet comrades, but if decisions are to be made under the threat of physical force I am not up to it. My first step in Party work, which I am taking after a long break, must be interrupted.¹²¹

The Poles refused Khrushchev admission to the plenum, elected Gomulka as planned, and made it clear that if the Russians interfered—ominous troop movements were taking place—they would arm their own workers and resist. At the same time, Gomulka offered reassurances that he had no intention of taking Poland out of the Warsaw Pact. Khrushchev quickly calmed down: "Here was a man," he later recalled,

who had come to power on the crest of an anti-Soviet wave, yet who could now speak forcefully about the need to preserve Poland's friendly relations with Soviet Russia and with the Soviet Communist Party. Perhaps I didn't appreciate this fact right at that moment, but I came to appreciate it afterwards.¹²²

It looked as though Poland had "adopted a course that will eliminate the unpleasant state of affairs," Khrushchev reported back to the Soviet party presidium on 24 October: "Finding a reason for an armed conflict now would be very easy, but finding a way to put an end to such a conflict would be very hard."¹²³ However graceless the process may have been, a Kremlin leader had for the first time *compromised* with another communist state on who its leader was to be.

If this was progress, though—and surely it was—it did not last. Even as Khrushchev spoke, disturbing reports were coming in from Budapest: "the situation in Hungary," he warned the presidium, "is extremely serious."¹²⁴ The Russians had authorized the removal of an unpopular party boss, Mathias Rakosi, in July; but unrest had continued to build there and news of the Polish compromise turned it into an outright rebellion. "[T]he leaders of the party and members of the government did not adopt the measures called for by the urgency of the situation," a Soviet analysis later noted. "Many of them were simply incapable of evaluating the state of things realistically."¹²⁵

After some confusion, Khrushchev reluctantly ordered the Red Army into Budapest to restore order, but to everyone's surprise it failed to do so: "the arrival of Soviet troops into the city has had a negative effect on the mood of the residents," one Hungarian party official reported cautiously to Moscow.¹²⁶ The residents had in fact responded with stones, grenades, and Molotov cocktails; local army and internal security forces looked likely to join them; and the government and party structure throughout much of the country seemed on the verge of collapse. Shifting his allegiance to the side of the rebels, the new Hungarian party leader, Imre Nagy, negotiated the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Budapest on 28 October. Shortly thereafter he announced that Hungary would leave the Warsaw Pact to become a neutral state.¹²⁷ Khrushchev's Polish settlement, it appeared, had produced a Hungarian debacle.

But this time he did act decisively. Worried that events might get out of hand elsewhere in Eastern Europe—but also aware that the simultaneous Suez crisis had preoccupied the United States and its allies—Khrushchev on 31 October secured the Soviet presidium's approval for all-out military intervention in Hungary. He spent the next several days rallying support from the Chinese, the Yugoslavs, the Poles, and the other East Europeans, each of whom—with varying degrees of enthusiasm—went along. On 4 November the Red Army moved in, and after three days of fighting in which some 20,000 Hungarians and 3,000 Soviet troops were killed, Hungary was safely back in the Soviet camp. The Yugoslavs granted Nagy asylum in their embassy but eventually released him under a promise of safe conduct from his successor, Janos Kadar—only to have the Russians seize the unfortunate rebel for trial and subsequent execution.¹²⁸ Khrushchev proved that he could be ruthless when he had to be.

That, though, was the painful point: Khrushchev *had* to be ruthless to hold his alliance together. He had hoped to make Marxism-Leninism attractive enough that Stalinist methods would not be needed to ensure its unity; but even the briefest experiment with de-Stalinization had set off centrifugal tendencies in Eastern Europe that ended in a bloodbath. "He was a kind man in normal human relationships," Fedor Burlatsky, one of his advisers, later recalled,

but in politics he did not recognize kindness, especially when it seemed to him that "class interests" had been infringed. Still smouldering in his heart were the ashes of the Stalin he himself had cast down. He executed Nagy as a lesson to all other leaders in socialist countries, thinking as he did so of Gomulka and Kadar, and perhaps also of Tito and Mao. In his eyes political expediency was superior to morality. Humanity came second to security.¹²⁹

"You need to give your people the right orientation," Khrushchev lectured demoralized Hungarian communists after it was all over. "You need to tell them that this [Nagy's movement] was a counterrevolution. If it was not, then how could we have used weapons?"¹³⁰ It was indeed Khrushchev's voice but Stalin's logic: "if they had *not* been enemies of the people, how could we have shot them?"

The Warsaw Pact survived, as did Khrushchev, although narrowly.¹³¹ But after 1956 no one could maintain the illusion that it was an Eastern European NATO: an alliance based on voluntary participation and democratic methods of operation. Despite Khrushchev's reforms, the asymmetry of imposition versus invitation remained. As a consequence, the Soviet Union could never count upon the loyalty of its European "allies:" it would have to watch *them* just as carefully as it did those of the United States. Little had really changed, then, since Stalin's day: the great ghost was not so easily exorcised after all.

VI

Stalin's ghost also haunted Khrushchev's relationship with his Chinese "allies," for here too exorcism produced an unexpected result. It was not a compromise,

as in Poland, or a rebellion, as in Hungary; instead it was a schism, in which true believers fell into a long and debilitating quarrel over what within their common faith was true and therefore to be believed. Tito's heresy had never reached that level because Yugoslavia never claimed the right to lead Marxist-Leninists throughout the world. But Mao Zedong's dissent was, for international communism, what the Protestant Reformation had been for the Roman Catholic Church. Only this time the reformers were within the established institution. The schismatics wanted to keep things as they had been.

Khrushchev failed to get the consent of his Chinese comrades before denouncing his predecessor at the 20th Party Congress—probably because he decided to go ahead only at the last moment.¹³² They were therefore as unprepared as all the other delegations present; unlike most of them, though, they protested. Stalin had “belonged not only to the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union] but also to other countries' communist parties,” Marshal Zhu De, who attended on Mao's behalf, reminded his hosts. “[Y]ou have criticized him without consulting the other parties. . . .” When apprised of this complaint, Khrushchev dismissed it more curtly than he should have: “Stalin was the leader of our party and we Soviet communists have the right to treat him as we deem fit.”¹³³ But surely it was asking a lot to continue to claim leadership over the world communist movement, on the one hand, while unilaterally disposing of its central icon, on the other. Mao soon found ways to point this out.

The Chairman's respect for Stalin had diminished considerably with the passage of time. The old dictator had done less than he might have to assist the Chinese military effort in Korea: fearing American nuclear retaliation, he had behaved, to Mao's disgust, more like a paper tiger than a real one. At the same time, as Khrushchev later admitted, “in many areas of our economic relations we had thrust ourselves into China like colonizers. . . . Stalin's demands for concessions from China were intolerable.”¹³⁴ Mao put up with all of this patiently, and on Stalin's death could still hail him as “the greatest genius of the present age.”¹³⁵ The tribute “was not for Stalin,” he later admitted, but “for the Soviet Communist Party. . . . [Y]our emotion tells you not to write these pieces, but your rationality compels you to do so.”¹³⁶ By the mid-1950s, he was complaining that Stalin had at no point adequately supported China's revolution: the Kremlin boss had even regarded him as a “Chinese Tito.”¹³⁷ Li Zhisui, Mao's physician, remembered being shocked “to hear that he and Stalin had in fact never gotten along.”¹³⁸

As a symbol, though, Stalin was still extremely useful to Mao. The reason had to do with his belief that the Chinese revolution had to replicate the stages the Russian revolution had gone through. There was no other example of a successful socialist uprising, so it was natural for the Chinese to want to follow the Soviet Union's path: hence their frequent references to that country as the “elder brother,” from whom the “younger brother” must learn.¹³⁹ Mao, though, was surprisingly literal about this. We have seen how he expected an American invasion of China in 1949 because the United States and its allies had sent troops to Siberia and North Russia in 1918;¹⁴⁰ the Korean and Indochinese con-

flicts, as he perceived it, were the functional equivalent of such foreign intervention. He had allowed a brief period of experimentation with state-sponsored capitalism, analogous to Lenin's New Economic Policy. He had then collectivized agriculture and launched a Five-Year Plan for rapid industrialization, both based carefully on the Soviet model.¹⁴¹ He was even willing to wait “eighteen or even more years” for diplomatic recognition from the United States, because it had taken seventeen to recognize the Soviet Union.¹⁴² And he was certainly developing, as Khrushchev noted, a “cult of personality”: “I believe Mao suffered from the same megalomania Stalin had all his life.”¹⁴³ Dr. Li would later confirm that Mao was “China's Stalin, and everyone knew it.”¹⁴⁴

It is true that Mao *adapted* the Soviet experience to the peculiar circumstances of China—often with peculiar results. He hoped also to *compress* the stages of revolutionary development, so that the transition to communism would take place more rapidly than in the USSR. But he appears never to have considered departing from the *sequence* Lenin and Stalin had pioneered: “The victory of socialist construction in the Soviet Union,” he had insisted at the time of Stalin's death, “proved in the most real-life terms the infinite correctness of Marxism-Leninism and concretely educated working people throughout the world on how they should advance toward a good life.”¹⁴⁵ This was not just the politeness of an obituary, because five years later in a candid private conversation Mao could still assure the Soviet ambassador that “nine out of ten fingers of yours and ours are quite the same with only one finger differing. . . . We trust your people, because you are from a socialist country, and you are sons and daughters of Lenin.”¹⁴⁶

Khrushchev, Mao understood correctly enough, was neither a Lenin nor a Stalin. It was of no little consequence that he had come to Beijing, in 1954, instead of waiting for Mao to come to Moscow: the point would hardly have been lost on any Chinese ruler with imperial aspirations.¹⁴⁷ The new Kremlin boss posed no threat, though, until he took it upon himself to try to de-Stalinize Marxism-Leninism just as Mao was entering into his Stalinist phase. Khrushchev was “handing the sword to others, helping the tigers harm us,” Mao fumed privately. “If they don't want the sword, we do. We can make the best use of it. The Soviet Union may attack Stalin, but we will not. Not only that, we will continue to support him.”¹⁴⁸

As was his habit when confronting resistance, Mao did not immediately take the offensive. He acknowledged that although Stalin had been “a great Marxist” and “a good and honest revolutionary, . . . in the course of a long period of time he made a number of great and serious mistakes, the primary ones of which were listed in Khrushchev's speech.”¹⁴⁹ He endorsed Moscow's handling of the Polish and Hungarian crises: they could be read, after all, as an indication either of the need for de-Stalinization or as an acknowledgement of its dangers.¹⁵⁰ Zhou Enlai, who visited Moscow and Warsaw early in 1957, explained to the Poles that “relations between our countries ought to be like the relations between brothers and not like the relations between a father and a son, like the past . . . relations between the USSR and Poland.” The Chinese had told the

Russians that "their position regarding the relations with fraternal parties is not always correct. But we do not believe this ought to be spoken of in public, so [that] we do not weaken the USSR."¹⁵¹

Mao himself revisited Moscow in November, on the 40th anniversary of the Bolshevik Revolution. When Khrushchev revived Stalin's old suggestion of a "division of labor" between the Russians and the Chinese in promoting world revolution, he respectfully declined on the grounds that "the CPSU should be the one and only center of the international Communist movement, and the rest of us should be united around that center." But Khrushchev, who had never trusted Mao, was uneasy: "we couldn't help suspecting that his thoughts were probably very different from his words."¹⁵² This was, we now know, true enough. Relations between the two parties, Mao later complained, had not been "brotherly" at all but more like those "between father and son or between cats and mice."¹⁵³ Moreover, the Soviets and their European allies lacked revolutionary self-confidence.¹⁵⁴ "Khrushchev lost the support of the people when he started the campaign against Stalin," Mao explained to his advisers, noting the perfunctory reception Muscovites had accorded the two leaders on their ride in from the airport. "No wonder they have lost their enthusiasm."¹⁵⁵

Enthusiasm, for Mao, was the essence of revolution. He never got over his fear that bureaucracies—party, government, or otherwise—might stifle it. It was bizarre, though, to attribute the loss of Soviet revolutionary élan to the hapless Khrushchev, and to hint that a return to Stalinism might revive it. Unless, of course, what Mao meant by "enthusiasm" was an *enforcement* of ardor coupled with a *smothering* of spontaneity on a mass scale, a condition Stalin would surely have understood. This was, indeed, the direction Mao had settled on by the time he made his Moscow visit.

Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign had initially weakened Mao's authority by encouraging warnings from within his own party about autocratic leadership: these surfaced at the 8th Party Congress, held in Beijing in September 1956. Mao himself appeared to confirm them the following February, when he made his famous call to let "one hundred flowers bloom and one hundred schools of thought contend."¹⁵⁶ There followed a remarkable outpouring of criticism from all sides, much of it directed against the party generally, some against Mao personally. Then, in June, he abruptly changed course, encouraging a counterattack on "rightists" who, he claimed, were attempting to wreck the revolution. "We want to coax the snakes out of their holes," Mao explained. "Then we will strike. My strategy is to let the poisonous weeds grow first and then destroy them one by one. Let them become fertilizer."¹⁵⁷

"[T]he slogan was intended as a provocation," Khrushchev remembered. "It was proclaimed in order to encourage people to express themselves more openly so that any flowers whose blossom had the wrong color or scent could be cut down and trampled in the dirt."¹⁵⁸ This may exaggerate Mao's foresight; but it is not unreasonable to see his "anti-rightist" campaign, once he decided to launch it, as echoing Stalin's purges. The Soviet leader too had enjoyed luring real and imagined enemies into the open, then lopping off their heads. The

results in China were not as bloody: "we won't kill anyone," Mao promised, pragmatically enough, "because if we were to kill anyone we would have to kill them all."¹⁵⁹ But the repressions were extremely thorough. Whatever enthusiasm was to develop would do so only under the tightest controls.

Mao then chose to follow Stalin in yet another sense—except that this time he wound up killing many more people than the Kremlin autocrat had ever dreamed of doing. The Great Leap Forward had complex roots and multiple objectives;¹⁶⁰ but it was fundamentally a rejection of planning in favor of enforced mass energy and enthusiasm. Although earlier efforts to emulate Soviet collectivization and industrialization had not worked out, Mao was not totally repudiating Stalin's example: the great "genius" too, at times, had become impatient with planning and had glorified the sheer force of will. The most famous instance was his promotion, in 1935, of the Stakhanovite movement, inspired by the feat of the miner Alexei Stakhanov, who in a single night was supposed to have mined 102 tons of coal, some fourteen times his norm.¹⁶¹ What Mao did in 1958, though, was to abandon planning altogether and substitute will on a national scale: all of China would be organized into people's communes, which would in turn—through the use of backyard furnaces—double the nation's steel production within a year. Mao would make Stakhanovites by the hundreds of millions.

"It was obvious what Mao was up to," Khrushchev recalled: "he thought that if he could match England and then catch the US by the tail in five years, he would be able to outdistance the Party of Lenin and surpass the strides the Soviet people had made since the October Revolution."¹⁶² To their credit, the Russians appear to have foreseen at least some of the consequences that lay ahead: the Chinese ambassador in Moscow reported, in October 1958, that the Soviet leadership "lacked sage understanding of the . . . new thoughts and new practices that have emerged in our [economic] development." The idea of "obtaining food without paying for it," in particular, was "incomprehensible" to them.¹⁶³ "It was perfectly clear to us," Khrushchev added,

that Mao Zedong had started down a wrong path that would lead to the collapse of his economy and, consequently, the failure of his policies. We did all we could to influence the Chinese and stop them before it was too late, but Mao thought he was God. Karl Marx and Lenin were both in their graves, and Mao thought he had no equal on earth.¹⁶⁴

His own physician has pictured Mao as "a frog looking at the sky from the bottom of a well, thinking he was seeing the world. He had no basis for asserting that the communist world would overtake the capitalist one . . . , no knowledge of what the capitalist world was like."¹⁶⁵

For a while, it all seemed to work. The communes were organized, the crops did come in, the steel was turned out.¹⁶⁶ But then it became obvious that the steel was unusable, having been forged by throwing whatever would melt into home-made furnaces with no quality controls. Even worse, the peasants had largely abandoned their crops and were cutting down their forests—often also cutting up their furniture—to keep the fires going. In their eagerness to comply

with Mao's directives, party officials inflated their reports as production dropped off.¹⁶⁷ The Chairman proudly toured the country, relishing the statistics his subordinates were feeding him, reassured by the fires lighting the landscape as far as one could see on either side of his private train as it sped through the night. But Li Zhisui, travelling with Mao, wondered "how the furnaces had appeared so suddenly and how the production figures could be so high." It turned out that

[w]hat we were seeing from our windows . . . was staged, a huge multi-act nationwide Chinese opera performed especially for Mao. The party secretaries had ordered furnaces constructed everywhere along the rail route, stretching out for ten *li* on either side. . . . In Hubei, [the] party secretary . . . had ordered the peasants to remove rice plants from faraway fields and transplant them along Mao's route, to give the impression of a wildly abundant crop. . . . All of China was a stage, all the people performers in an extravaganza for Mao.

The Chairman, it seems, had imported, and vastly improved upon, yet another Russian product: the Potemkin village. But even after discovering the deception, Mao "gave no order to halt the backyard steel furnaces. . . . [He] still did not want to do anything to dampen the enthusiasm of the masses."¹⁶⁸

Mao's experiment in economics did surpass the record of everyone else in the world, although not in the manner he had intended: the Great Leap Forward, it is now clear, produced the most devastating famine in modern history. We will never know how many people died, but estimates of the toll range from 16 to 27 million, with the higher figure probably the more accurate one. Earlier Chinese famines had come nowhere near this appalling total, nor had the one Stalin's collectivization of agriculture set off inside the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁹ It is possible, indeed, that the combined deaths from the famine *and* the purges in the USSR, *together with* those Hitler caused in the Holocaust, would still not match the number this single Maoist initiative, between 1958 and 1961, is thought to have brought about.¹⁷⁰ The Chairman, whose visage once adorned the t-shirts and dormitory walls of his Western admirers, therefore probably holds the record as the greatest mass murderer of all time.

But was the Great Leap Forward an experiment in *Marxist-Leninist* economics? Khrushchev, for obvious reasons, was desperate to deny that. Aware that the Chinese were starving by the millions—how many millions would not become clear for years to come—at least as worried by Mao's apparent willingness to expend millions more in a nuclear war,¹⁷¹ he warned in June 1960 that ideology could be taken *too* literally: "We live in a time when we have neither Marx, nor Engels, nor Lenin with us. If we act like children who, studying the alphabet, compile words from letters, we shall not go very far." The Chinese, now on the defensive, shot back that Khrushchev was being "arbitrary, and tyrannical." He had "treated the relationship between the great Communist Party of the Soviet Union and our Party not as one between brothers, but as one between patriarchal father and son."¹⁷²

That response, in turn, was enough to make Khrushchev, on 16 July, abruptly announce the withdrawal of all forms of economic and technical assistance to

China, just as the Beijing government was focusing on the scale of the disaster it confronted and beginning to think about how to recover from it.¹⁷³ The effects were devastating: "Your withdrawal of experts has inflicted damages upon us, thus causing us a great deal of difficulties," Deng Xiaoping admitted to a Soviet delegation two months later. But "[t]he Chinese people are . . . determined to make up for the losses with our own hands and build our own nation."¹⁷⁴

The implications, from Moscow's perspective, were that the Chinese had perverted—even caricatured—the planning process that was at the center of the Marxist-Leninist model. We now know, though, that Khrushchev's own methods were closer to those of Mao—if far less costly in human lives—than he was prepared to acknowledge. At the 22nd Party Congress, held in the fall of 1961, the Kremlin leader predicted, on the basis of what he claimed was a carefully designed program, that in per capita production the Soviet Union would, by 1970, surpass the United States. Communism itself would be in place by 1980. Marxism-Leninism would prevail, not by military force, but by demonstrating its unquestionable economic superiority.¹⁷⁵ Khrushchev's speech-writer Fedor Burlatsky recalls, though, that the statistics supporting these claims "were complete fabrications—pure wishful thinking." The Soviet economy by then was in serious trouble; Khrushchev had made his projections against the advice of his own planners.¹⁷⁶ Simply proclaiming lofty goals, he *and* Mao appear to have believed, would overcome all difficulties: the will of the people was what counted; professional expertise was not required. Both leaders, in this sense, were like frogs at the bottom of wells, aspiring to reach the sky but with no idea of how to get there.

And what of John F. Kennedy, who had just committed the United States to place a man on the moon by 1970 without any clear idea as to how this was to be accomplished?¹⁷⁷ The difference, it would appear, was that Kennedy did not insist upon an ideologically correct method of making his great leap: he would get there by whatever method worked. Neither Khrushchev nor Mao would accept that kind of pragmatism in their economic planning. They imposed strict ideological constraints, and they took it upon themselves, personally, to determine how these would be applied. It was as if Kennedy had insisted that only Democrats, or Roman Catholics, or citizens of Massachusetts could work in the space program, that the science involved required legitimation in the writings of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt, and that failures would be fixed only when he personally recognized them as such. Khrushchev had the good sense not to run his own space program that way: the absurdity would have been obvious. But the economy was far more important to him and to his country in the long run than launching Sputniks, and such absurdities afflicted it—as was the case in Mao's China—at almost every step of the way.

The reason was that neither could bear to share authority. Khrushchev *had* to be the boss; Mao *had* to be the emperor. Both came out of cultures—ideological and national—that distrusted spontaneity: despite their revolutionary origins, they feared it deeply. What this meant was that originality, innovation, insight,

wisdom—and moral compassion—could only with great difficulty reach the top. For Marxist-Leninist systems to draw upon these qualities, they had to be present already in the leader, who really did have to be, as Mao said of Stalin, “the greatest genius of the present age.” That was setting high standards indeed, and perhaps it explains why the more democratic statesmen of the West—who saw no threat to their authority in seeking the advice of others—generally came closer to landing where they had planned to when they began to leap.

VII

By the time Khrushchev was forced from office in October 1964, wars among capitalists, of the kind Lenin and Stalin had anticipated, were nowhere in sight. Wars between communists and capitalists looked likely to be confined—after the shock of the Cuban missile crisis¹⁷⁸—to “third world” conflicts like the one escalating in Vietnam. Wars among communists, though, were all too real a possibility: the ideological schism between the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China had become so intense during the Khrushchev years that as they ended his representatives were secretly discussing *with the Americans* plans for *joint preventive military action* against Chinese nuclear facilities in the Gobi desert.¹⁷⁹ It is difficult to know what to make of these contacts, which ended with the first Chinese nuclear test and Khrushchev’s virtually simultaneous overthrow. But they do reflect a situation few Marxist-Leninist theorists had foreseen:¹⁸⁰ that the greatest risk of great power war could be between the greatest Marxist-Leninist states.

One might explain this unexpected development by the fact that Khrushchev and Mao, from the time they first met in Beijing in 1954, appear to have loathed one another as well as their respective surroundings.¹⁸¹ The new Kremlin leader found the atmosphere in the Chinese capital “typically Oriental”—it is not clear what else he expected—“sickeningly sweet”, and “nauseating.” He discovered that he did not like green tea. He claims to have told his colleagues, upon his return, that conflict with China was inevitable.¹⁸² “We took great care never to offend China until the Chinese actually started to crucify us,” he later recalled, but “when they did start to crucify us—well, I’m no Jesus Christ, and I didn’t have to turn the other cheek.”¹⁸³ Mao thought little better of Moscow in 1957, or of his Soviet host. “It’s not to our liking,” he complained about the food. “Why did they dance that way, prancing around on their toes?” he demanded of Khrushchev, before walking out on a performance of *Swan Lake*. And when Khrushchev made a return visit to Beijing in 1958, Mao was deliberately rude to him, to the point of receiving his guest in swimming trunks: it was a way, he cheerfully admitted, of “sticking a needle up his ass.”¹⁸⁴

Western leaders, too, did not always get along: John Foster Dulles and Anthony Eden seem to have taken a particular pleasure in tormenting one another; and Charles de Gaulle chose to torment everyone—thereby transmut-

ing the French strategic doctrine of “*défense tous azimuts*” into one of “offense in all directions.” Such animosities could certainly sour relations within NATO, but they never shaped them to the extent that the Khrushchev–Mao rivalry affected the Sino-Soviet alliance. The reason was simple enough: apart from de Gaulle, no Western leader thought of himself as personifying a state.¹⁸⁵ There were always multiple channels of communication, and even if leaders at the top did despise one another, subordinates could always smooth things over. The revolutionaries who ruled in Moscow and Beijing, however, could not allow this. History, culture, and ideology combined to lock them into authoritarian methods of governing, which meant that their own emotions became state policy. The effect, paradoxically, was to throw diplomacy back to the days of absolute monarchs, when questions of war and peace could hinge upon their ability to avoid personally insulting one another.

If clashes of personality were one of the “contradictions” that undermined Marxist-Leninist solidarity, so too was a contrast in structures: the Western alliance proved to be far more flexible than its Eastern counterparts. To see this point, one need only contrast Hungary’s *attempted* departure from the Warsaw Pact in 1956 with France’s *actual* departure from its military role in NATO a decade later. The French, arguably, were the more important ally: their country was larger, wealthier, and more powerful than Hungary, and NATO’s own headquarters lay within its territory. Certainly the Americans and their other allies worried about the precedent de Gaulle’s withdrawal might set, and a few die-hard Atlanticists responded bitterly to it. The overall reaction, though, was surprisingly mild: despite its abrupt expulsion, NATO’s response was limited to expressions of regret, followed by quick action to remove its forces and facilities.¹⁸⁶ If it occurred to anyone in Washington or elsewhere even to think of treating de Gaulle as Khrushchev had dealt with Imre Nagy, they kept such thoughts to themselves. No one denounced the French president as a heretic, no one proposed overt or covert action to overthrow him, and France soon settled into a pattern of practical cooperation with NATO, even as in principle it remained aloof.¹⁸⁷

Sometimes the things that *do not* happen in history—the things, indeed, that everyone assumes *could not* have happened—are nonetheless revealing. The fact that NATO could absorb and adapt to as easily as it did the challenge from Paris, while the Warsaw Pact felt obliged to resist and ultimately crush the one from Budapest; the fact that it is so difficult in retrospect to imagine these roles being reversed; the fact that neither side at the time gave serious thought to behaving otherwise—all of this suggests an important difference between the two great Cold War coalitions, which is that one was resilient and the other brittle. NATO, we can now see, was an *organic* alliance: it proved to be deeply rooted, in tune with its environment, capable even of shedding branches and limbs when necessary without serious damage. But both the Warsaw Pact and the Sino-Soviet alliance seem today to have been *inorganic*, even *crystalline* in character: they were impressive to look at and hard when touched, but under strain they shattered easily.¹⁸⁸

What, though, might account for this difference? Here we come to a third “contradiction” in the Marxist-Leninist coalition, which has to do with its leaders’ concept of democracy. They often chose to describe their regimes as “peoples’ democracies,” but there was always an ambivalence in the meaning of that term. One can see it best in Khrushchev. He was surely right when he insisted that however progressive a regime might be, it would sooner or later have to improve the lot of those who lived under it, otherwise they would overthrow it. In this crude sense, he understood the principle of representative government and even sought to explain it in his memoirs:

[I]n a democracy it is difficult for a leader to stay in power if he doesn’t make a point of consulting with his followers. A democratic leader must have a good mind and be able to take advice. He must realize that his position of leadership depends on the people’s will to have him as their leader, not on his own will to lead the people.

But Khrushchev immediately went on to reveal the limits of his understanding:

And the people will accept a leader only if he shows himself to be of the same flesh and blood as the Party. . . . [H]e holds his position of leadership by the will of the Party. In other words, he is not above the Party, but the servant of the Party, and he can keep his position only as long as he enjoys the Party’s satisfaction and support.¹⁸⁹

The circular reasoning here was striking: leaders must respond to the people, but the people will respond only to the Party—which of course, in a Marxist-Leninist society, can respond only to leaders *not* chosen by the people.

Western democratic leaders also worried, in the wake of World War II, about delivering on their promises and the loss of legitimacy that might accompany their failure to do so. But they never saw a single hierarchically organized Party, regulating everything from the top, as the way out. Instead they relied upon two laterally organized and largely self-regulating mechanisms—market economics and democratic politics—which made a point of *not* assuming total wisdom and absolute competence at the top. These systems were *more* willing than their Marxist-Leninist counterparts to trust “the masses,” *less* prepared to defer obediently to those who ruled them. For all its inefficiencies and occasional injustices, democratic capitalism proved during the critical decade of the 1950s that it could build societies based on sustained popular support as well as alliances capable of coordinated military action. Marxism-Leninism, in stark contrast, had shattered one alliance and held together another only by force; its economic achievements had been reduced, by 1960, to Khrushchev’s hollow promises of overtaking the West in yet another decade—and to the great deaths that resulted from Mao’s Great Leap.¹⁹⁰

EIGHT

Nuclear Weapons and the Escalation of the Cold War

Even if the U.S. atom bombs were so powerful that, when dropped on China, they would make a hole right through the earth, or even blow it up, that would hardly mean anything to the universe as a whole, though it might be a major event for the solar system.

Mao Zedong, January 1955¹

[T]he United States is piling up armaments which it well knows will never provide for its ultimate safety. We are piling up these armaments because we do not know what else to do to provide for our security.

Dwight D. Eisenhower, January 1956²

GIVEN the failure of the Marxist-Leninist model to deliver on its promises of economic prosperity and social justice; given the fact that the Sino-Soviet alliance was falling apart and that only the use of force had held the Warsaw Pact together; given the success with which the Western democracies had managed to organize their own economies and alliances—given all that had become clear by the beginning of the 1960s, why did the Cold War not end at that point? A *multi-dimensional* measurement of power might have concluded that the Soviet Union’s cause, by that time, was already lost: that because its capabilities were becoming so *mono-dimensional*, narrowing as they had from the political, economic, ideological and military strengths of 1945 to little beyond the latter in 1961, there was no way in which it could hope to prevail over the United States, the coalition it had assembled, and the increasingly robust international economy the western democracies were building. Khrushchev’s hyperbolic pronouncements, from that perspective, would have sounded like whistles in a graveyard.

They did not seem so at the time, though, because the Soviet Union’s achievements in military technology overshadowed its failures in politics, economics, and ideology. Khrushchev’s dilemmas with respect to de-Stalinization, agricultural and industrial modernization, and international communist solidarity were certainly known in the west,³ but their significance was not.

challenges to the other's sphere of influence. Anomalies like a divided Germany and Korea—even absurdities like a walled capitalist West Berlin in the middle of a communist East Germany, or an American naval base on the territory of a Soviet ally just off the coast of Florida—came to seem quite normal. The strategic arms race intensified in the wake of the missile crisis, but it was conducted within an increasingly precise set of rules, codified in formal agreements like the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963, the Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1968, and the Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty of 1972, as well as the equally important informal understanding that both sides would tolerate satellite reconnaissance. By the late 1970s the Cold War had evolved, or so it seemed, into a robust, sustainable, and at least at the superpower level, *peaceful* international system.¹⁰⁹

We now know, though, that the “long peace” was not a *permanent* peace. The Soviet Union's military strength failed in the end to save it; its non-military weaknesses eventually destroyed it. But it took a very long time for that to happen. By discouraging external challenges, by continuing to convey an Oz-like image long after the original Wizard's forced retirement, nuclear weapons and the fear they generated may well have stretched out the process of decay inside the USSR—in effect slowing down time—although they could not reverse it. Not the least of the Cold War's oddities is that its outcome was largely determined before two-thirds of it had even been fought.

TEN

The New Cold War History: First Impressions

And despite the many failings of the United States, there was no doubt that the world, for all its misery, was a better place than it would have been without American resistance to Joseph Stalin's vision.

Warren I. Cohen¹

Readers should not be misled by the confident tone of the literature (including my own observations) into confusing opinion with established truth.

Eric Hobsbawm²

HISTORY does not end, but historians sooner or later must. The patience of readers, the constraints imposed by publishers, the limits of our own energy and insight—all of these require that we find convenient points at which to conclude our books. When writing about war, this is usually not difficult. Most wars begin and end at specific points; and although historians may debate their origins, conduct, and consequences, they rarely disagree about their dates. Nor is there apt to be much doubt about who won, although there may be about why. Such certainties are possible because historians generally wait until wars are over to begin writing about them. Beginnings, endings, and consequences tend to be, by then, self-evident.

Consider what the history of any great war might look like if accounts of it began to appear before the fighting had ceased. Historians would hardly be able to draw equally and dispassionately upon the archives of each belligerent, with a view to determining who started it. Available sources would be biased and incomplete. Winners and losers would remain unclear, as would the circumstances of victory or defeat. A history of World War I composed as late as the winter of 1918, or of World War II completed in 1942, would differ dramatically from those familiar to us; for these would be histories written from *within* a great event, not after it. It is precisely that quality of coming *after* that causes us—most of the time—to regard a narrative as “historical” in the first place.

World War I took four years to fight; World War II required six. The Cold

War, however, dragged on for four and a half decades: more than *ten times* the length of the 1914–18 war, *seven times* that of 1939–45. Historians chose, reasonably enough, not to await the Cold War's end before beginning to write about it. This meant, though, that until recently their real histories resembled our imaginary histories of the two world wars: they lacked equivalent access to archives on each side, and they were written without knowing how it would all come out.³ Despite divergent and often discordant interpretations, all Cold War historians—whether of orthodox, revisionist, post-revisionist, corporatist, international, cultural, or post-modernist persuasions—fell into the unusual habit of working within their chosen period rather than after it.⁴

What seems most striking now about this “old” Cold War history are not the disagreements that took place among its practitioners but rather its common characteristics. It showed little of the detachment that comes from following, not reflecting, a historical epoch.⁵ It gave one side disproportionate attention: whether critical or complementary, most of this scholarship focused on the United States, its allies, or its clients. It neglected the fact that *two* superpowers dominated the post-1945 world; that each often acted in response to what the other had done; and that third parties responded to—but sometimes manipulated—each of them. It emphasized *interests*, which it mostly defined in material terms—what people possessed, or wanted to possess. It tended to overlook *ideas*—what people believed, or wanted to believe.

There were various reasons for these deficiencies. The Cold War went on for so long that toward its end few experts on it had experienced any other international system: comparisons across time and space faded as a result. Marxist-Leninist states got slighted because they kept so much of their history so carefully hidden: until the late 1980s none had even begun to open the kind of archives routinely available in the west. “Realist” and “neorealist” theorists of international relations regarded what went on inside people's heads as hard to measure, and therefore easy to dismiss.⁶

The “new” Cold War history is likely to depart from these patterns in several ways. It will treat its subject as a discrete episode with a known beginning and end, not as a continuing or even permanent condition. It will place the Cold War within the stream of time; it will not confuse the Cold War *with* the stream of time. It will acknowledge that there have been, and will assuredly be, other ways of organizing international relations than those practiced after World War II. It will therefore place its subject within a broader comparative framework than the “old” Cold War history managed to do.

The “new” Cold War history will be multi-archival, in that it will at least *attempt* to draw upon the records of *all* major participants in that conflict. It will abandon the asymmetry that provided clinical detail on the public *and* behind-the-scenes behavior of western leaders, but little beyond speculation when it came to backstage maneuvering within the Marxist-Leninist world. It will thus be a truly international history, affirmative action for the “second” as well as the “first” and “third” worlds.⁷

The “new” Cold War history will take ideas seriously: here the way that conflict ended is bound to reshape our view of how it began and evolved. For the events of 1989–91 make sense only in terms of ideas. There was no military defeat or economic crash; but there was a collapse of legitimacy. The people of one Cold War empire suddenly realized that its emperors had no clothes on. As in the classic tale, though, that insight resulted from a shift in how people thought, not from any change in what they saw.

All of these practices—knowing the outcome, having multiple sources, paying attention to ideas—are decidedly old-fashioned. They are the way history is written most of the time. They suggest not only that the “old” Cold War history is out of date; it was also *an abnormal way of writing history itself*. It was the product of an abnormal age, which was the Cold War itself. Like the post-Cold War world in which it exists, the “new” Cold War history is only getting us back to normal.

But what does it all amount to? How might this view of the Cold War from the outside—and from the “other side”—change our understanding of it? What follows are first impressions, gleaned from writing this book, stated as a series of hypotheses. They are, most emphatically, subject to refinement, revision, and even subsequent rejection in the light of additional evidence. They represent what I think we know *now* but did not know, at least not as clearly, while the Cold War was going on. We will surely know *more*, though, as time passes and the Cold War completes its lengthy progression from that most frightening of contemporary anxieties to just another distant, dusty, historical memory.

I

The first of these hypotheses is that *the diversification of power did more to shape the course of the Cold War than did the balancing of power*.

A key assumption of the “old” Cold War history was that with the defeat of Germany and Japan, the international system shifted from a multipolar to a bipolar configuration.⁸ The great powers of Europe appeared to have committed a kind of collective suicide, leaving the United States and the Soviet Union as even greater superpowers. Whereas earlier history had seen several large states competing within the global arena, the future now lay, or so it seemed, in the hands of only two. Alexis de Tocqueville had predicted in 1835 that Russians and Americans would one day dominate the destinies of half the earth, and in 1945 it certainly looked as though their time had come.

This switch from multipolarity to bipolarity also impressed theorists. “Realists” interpreted it to mean that only the balancing of power would ensure peace.⁹ By the 1970s, “neo-realists” saw bipolarity as so deeply rooted that stability was sure to result from it. Their most influential spokesman, Kenneth Waltz, foresaw the possibility that the Cold War might someday end—but only because bipolarity would make that possible. The Soviet Union and the United

States would dominate the post-Cold War world, he predicted in 1979, for as far into the future as one could foresee.¹⁰

Obviously both the historians and the theorists got it wrong. The error arose, I think, from the way we calculated power during the Cold War years. We did so almost entirely in monodimensional terms, focusing particularly on military indices, when a multidimensional perspective might have told us more. The end of the Cold War made it blindingly clear that military strength does not always determine the course of great events: the Soviet Union collapsed, after all, with its arms and armed forces fully intact. Deficiencies in other kinds of power—economic, ideological, cultural, moral—caused the USSR to lose its superpower status, and we can now see that a slow but steady erosion in those non-military capabilities had been going on for some time.

To visualize what happened, imagine a troubled triceratops.¹¹ From the outside, as rivals contemplated its sheer size, tough skin, bristling armament, and aggressive posturing, the beast looked sufficiently formidable that none dared tangle with it. Appearances deceived, though, for within its digestive, circulatory, and respiratory systems were slowly clogging up, and then shutting down. There were few external signs of this until the day the creature was found with all four feet in the air, still awesome but now bloated, stiff, and quite dead. The moral of the fable is that armaments make impressive exoskeletons, but a shell alone ensures the survival of no animal and no state.

Had we understood better that power exists in multiple forms; had we perceived that some kinds of power can exist in a bipolar configuration while others are distributed more widely; had we allowed for the possibility that power, whether within a state or a system of states, can evolve either toward or away from diversity; had we grasped these subtleties, we might have seen sooner than we did that bipolarity was an artifact of the way World War II ended and therefore also of the improbable series of events that had caused World War II. It was *not* a fundamental change in the nature of the international system. That system remained *multidimensional* throughout the Cold War, and the Soviet Union's slow descent into monodimensionality is what eventually killed it. Multidimensionality may be multipolarity more accurately conceived.

II

Another hypothesis that emerges from the "new" Cold War history is that *the United States and the Soviet Union built empires after World War II, although not of the same kind.*

Most "old" Cold War historians acknowledged that despite its anti-imperial traditions the United States constructed an empire after 1945: what they debated was whether this happened intentionally or by inadvertence. Was the American empire the result of a domestically rooted drive for markets and

investment opportunities abroad? Or was it an accidental by-product of having rushed to fill a power vacuum in Europe, a reflex that would cause Americans to meddle wherever else in the world they thought there *might* be a Soviet threat? Either way, credibility became the currency in which the United States, like most empires in the past, counted its assets.

Much the same was true, it now appears, of the Soviet Union. Partly driven by ideological and geostrategic ambitions, partly responding to the opportunities that lay before him, Stalin too built a postwar European empire. With Mao's victory, he hoped—not quite trusting his own good fortune—to extend it to China; Khrushchev sought similar objectives in the "third world." But as problems developed, whether in Korea or later in Cuba, fears of falling dominoes surfaced about as often in Moscow as in Washington: hence Stalin's extraordinary pressure on the Chinese to save Kim Il-sung; hence Khrushchev's remarkable risk-taking in defense of Fidel Castro.

From an imperial perspective there was little new here. All empires fear losing credibility; one might conclude, therefore, that the Soviet and American empires did not differ all that much from one another. But other findings from the "new" Cold War history suggest that such an "equivalency" argument, at least as far as Europe and Japan are concerned, would be quite wrong. To see why, consider another issue all empires have had to face: will their subjects collaborate or resist? The difficulty of managing any empire is bound to vary accordingly; but it is the *occupied*, not the occupiers, who make this choice. Even the apparently powerless have that much power.

More than a decade ago, the historian Geir Lundestad revealed distinctive patterns of collaboration and resistance when he pointed out that the West Europeans "invited" the United States to construct an empire and include them within it, in the hope of containing the empire the Russians were imposing on eastern Europe.¹² This argument still makes sense, but with certain refinements.

One is that Stalin appears also to have *hoped* for an "invitation," especially in Germany, perhaps elsewhere in Eastern Europe, possibly even in Japan. The disarray now evident in his policies toward these regions may reflect the fact that it never came. If so, the Europeans and the Japanese become critical players, for while it was hardly within their power to prevent Soviet or American domination, they were free to welcome or fear that process. Their responses were not always overt, especially in countries the Red Army occupied. Resistance is no less significant, however, for taking sullen or subtle forms: officials in Moscow soon lost whatever illusions they might have had that they could count, in a crunch, upon their East European and German "allies." The Americans, if anything, *underestimated* the loyalty of their NATO partners and the Japanese. In Europe and Northeast Asia, then, these were hardly equivalent empires.¹³ The American presence had a strong base of popular support, confirmed repeatedly as free elections kept the governments in power that had invited it. The Soviet presence never won such acceptance: that, no doubt, is why free elections within Moscow's sphere of influence ceased to be held.

Patterns blur, to be sure, when one looks elsewhere. It is clear now that the

Chinese—or at least their new communist leaders—initially extended an invitation to the *Russians* and resisted what they saw as threats from the Americans. In Southeast Asia as well as the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, invitations to both superpowers were periodically advanced and withdrawn. Whether the Russians or the Americans responded more brutally—or more humanely—is difficult to say: as always, the “third world” defies easy generalizations. Decisions to collaborate or resist depended upon time, place, and circumstances.

But the “third world” did not, in the end, determine the Cold War’s outcome. What took place in Europe and Japan largely did, and there the results were decisive: where possible, the inhabitants resisted the Soviet Union and collaborated with the United States; where impossible, most wished passionately that they could have done so. That raises the question of why Washington’s empire, in those pivotal regions, generated so much less friction than Moscow’s.

III

One answer may be that *many people then saw the Cold War as a contest of good versus evil, even if historians since have rarely done so.*

Let me focus here on a single significant case: it has to do with what happened in Germany immediately after the war as its citizens confronted their respective occupiers. What Stalin sought there, it now seems clear, was a communist regime in the east that would attract Germans in the west without requiring the use of force, something the Russians could ill afford given their own exhaustion and the Americans’ monopoly over the atomic bomb.¹⁴

Obviously, this is not what he got. Germans first voted with their feet—fleeing to the west in huge numbers to avoid the Red Army—and then at the ballot box in ways that frustrated all of Stalin’s hopes. But this outcome was not fore-ordained. There were large numbers of communist party members throughout Germany at the end of the war, and their prestige—because of their opposition to the Nazis—had never been higher. Why did the Germans so overwhelmingly welcome the Americans and their allies, and fear the Russians?

It has long been known that the Red Army behaved brutally toward German civilians in those parts of the country it occupied, and that this treatment contrasted strikingly with that accorded the Germans in the American, British, and French zones. What we had not known, until recently, is how pervasive the problem of rape was: Red Army soldiers may have assaulted as many as *two million* German women in 1945–6. There were few efforts for many months to stop this behavior, or to discipline those who indulged in it. To this day, some Soviet officers recall the experience much as Stalin saw it at the time: troops that had risked their lives and survived deserved a little fun.¹⁵

Now, obviously rape in particular, and brutality in general, is always a problem when armies occupy the territory of defeated adversaries. Certainly Russian

troops had good reason to hate the Germans, given what they had done inside the Soviet Union. But these semi-sanctioned mass rapes took place precisely as Stalin was trying to *win the support* of the German people, not just in the east but throughout the country. He even allowed elections to be held inside the Soviet zone in the fall of 1946, only to have the Germans—women in particular—vote overwhelmingly against the Soviet-supported candidates.¹⁶

The incidence of rape and other forms of brutality was so much greater on the Soviet than on the western side that it played a major role in determining which way Germans would tilt in the Cold War that was to come. It ensured a pro-western orientation from the very beginning of that conflict, which surely helps to account for why the West German regime was able to establish itself as a legitimate government while its East German counterpart never did.

What happened here was not a reflection of high policy; it was rather a matter of occupying armies, in the absence of clear orders, falling back upon their own domestic standards of acceptable behavior. The rules of civil society implicit in democratic politics made the humanitarian treatment of defeated enemies seem natural to the Western allies. Their troops did not have to be ordered to do this—they just did it, and it did not occur to them to do otherwise. Much the same thing happened, with equally important results, in occupied Japan. But thanks to Stalin and Hitler, Russian troops came out of a culture of brutality with few parallels in modern history. Having been brutalized themselves, it did not occur to many of them that there was anything wrong with brutalizing others. And it did not occur to their leaders to put a stop to this process until after it had lost them Germany.

In this instance, then, civility on one side and its absence on the other played an enormous role in shaping the course of events. The rapes dramatized differences between Soviet authoritarianism and American democracy in ways that could hardly have been more direct. Social history, even gender history, intersected with inhumanity to make diplomatic history. What this suggests, then, is that historians of the Cold War need to look quite carefully at what those who *saw* distinctions between good and evil *thought and did* about them. For when people vote with their feet, it generally means they have ideas in their minds. But to understand these, we have to take seriously what *they at the time believed*.

No historian looking at the religious practices of late antiquity, or at the medieval peasantry, or even at revolutions in America, France, or Russia, would doubt the importance of seeking out the voices and viewpoints of everyday life. And yet, when looking at the origins, the evolution, and the end of the Cold War—or for that matter at the gap between popular and academic perceptions of the past today—historians seem to want to tell the public what its memories ought to be.¹⁷ A little self-scrutiny might be in order here, to see whether we are treating the distant past and the recent past in exactly the same way.

IV

If the American empire generated less resistance than did its Soviet counterpart, another reason may be that *democracy proved superior to autocracy in maintaining coalitions*.

Democratic principles seemed ill-suited to foreign policy as the Cold War began. The founding fathers of "realism"—Morgenthau, Kennan, Lippmann, E. H. Carr—tended to blame Wilsonian "legalism-moralism" for having led to the League of Nations, the Washington Naval Treaties, the Kellogg-Briand Pact, and all the other well-meaning gestures that had failed so conspicuously to prevent World War II.¹⁸ None of these initiatives, they insisted, had taken into account the actual power relationships that determined the course of international relations. If the western democracies were to survive in the postwar world—which was likely to be as cold and cruel as the prewar world—they would have to abandon the illusion that they could conduct diplomacy as they ran their domestic affairs. It would be necessary to learn about balances of power, covert operations, and the permanent peacetime uses of military force—idealists, in short, would have to master the cynical art of *Realpolitik*.

As always with Kennan, there was a certain ambivalence. On the one hand, he stressed how little use he had for democratic procedures in the making of foreign policy: witness his memorable comparison of democracy to "one of those prehistoric monsters with a body as long as this room and a brain the size of a pin."¹⁹ On the other hand, he expected containment to work by having the United States remain true to its principles, which presumably included those of democratic politics: "The greatest danger that can befall us in coping with this problem of Soviet communism, is that we shall allow ourselves to become like those with whom we are coping."²⁰

This danger, it is now clear, never materialized. Despite frequent departures from them, the United States on the whole retained its traditional values; it also allowed these, from time to time, to shape its Cold War policies. It did so, to be sure, less from intention than instinct: when otherwise unsure what to do, Americans tended to revert to their democratic habits and encourage others to adopt them as well.²¹ Far from being the impractical idealism the "realists" feared, though, such behavior turned out to be eminently realistic. Consider three key episodes, all of which illustrate the extension of American domestic practices into the foreign policy realm: the democratizations (by way of military occupation) of Germany and Japan, the management of the NATO alliance, and the encouragement of European integration.

What each of these had in common was the stake in the success of the enterprise the Americans gave their allies by involving them in design, organization, and administration. German and Japanese occupations provided the fewest opportunities, yet even here it is striking to what extent Generals Clay and MacArthur adapted their reforms to local conditions while still, for the most part, making them stick. NATO was very much a joint venture: Europeans pro-

posed it, and the United States permitted them a surprising amount of influence over its structure and strategies. European integration for years has flourished independently of the Americans, but it could hardly have arisen had not Washington insisted upon European cooperation in return for economic and military assistance during the late 1940s. Only then did the process become self-organizing, with a character very much its own.

It is difficult to imagine the Soviet Union acting similarly. Its occupation policies in Germany backfired, failing to generate popular support. The Warsaw Pact never operated as NATO did: there was little sense of mutual interest, especially after the events of 1956. Once the Korean War was over, the Sino-Soviet alliance functioned no better. Nor was there spontaneous economic or political integration within the Soviet sphere: instead, everything had to be routed through and managed from Moscow, in the classic manner of old-fashioned empires.

The Americans constructed a new kind of empire—a democratic empire—for the simple reason that they were, by habit and history, democratic in their politics. They were used to the bargaining and deal-making, the coercion and conciliation, that routinely takes place within such a system. They did not automatically regard resistance as treason. Their example, as a consequence, spread easily; it also coexisted comfortably with other democracies where they were already in place.

The Russians, coming out of an authoritarian tradition, knew of no way to deal with independent thinking other than to smother it. The slightest signs of autonomy, for Stalin, were heresy, to be rooted out with all the thoroughness of the Spanish Inquisition. The result was surely subservience, but it was never self-organization. To the extent that it gave others a stake in the enterprise, that stake may have been as much in welcoming failure as success.

In this sense, then, preserving democratic ideals turned out to be a very realistic thing for the west to have done. The Kennan of the X article was a lot more prescient than the Kennan haunted by visions of democratic dinosaurs.

V

A related hypothesis is that, in contrast to democratic realism, *Marxism-Leninism during the Cold War fostered authoritarian romanticism*.

In his recent book, *Diplomacy*, Henry Kissinger faults Hitler for having fallen prey to visions based more on emotion than on rational calculation. Stalin, he claims, was brutally realistic, prepared to take as long as necessary to achieve his goals, willing to adapt ideology as needed to justify them. For Hitler, Kissinger seems to be saying, ideology determined objectives, and practical difficulties were not allowed to stand in the way. For Stalin, it was the other way around: the objectives determined the ideology, which was adjusted as necessary to shifting circumstances.²² That certainly has been the standard view of how

Marxist-Leninist states functioned, and as a consequence the "old" Cold War history failed to take ideology very seriously.

The new sources suggest the need to reconsider, for they seem to suggest that ideology often *determined* the behavior of Marxist-Leninist regimes: it was not simply a justification for actions already decided upon. In one sense, this should hardly surprise us. The Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and other such states based their very legitimacy upon an ideology which, with its premium on orthodoxy and its deep distrust of heresy, permeated all aspects of daily life. Why, except for ideology, would Kremlin leaders retain a system of collectivized agriculture that had repeatedly shown itself not to work? Why, for that matter, insist on a command economy in the first place, since the evidence of its failures was almost as compelling? Foreign policy too reflected ideology, in ways that resist alternative explanations.

Take, for example, what we now know to have been Stalin's persistent belief, after 1945, that the next war would take place within the *capitalist* world. It came, of course, from a literal reading of Lenin: capitalists were so greedy, the great man had insisted, so preoccupied with finding ways to cheat or exploit one another, that they would never be able to cooperate on anything for very long. But these Leninist expectations kept Stalin from seeing what was really happening during the early postwar years: Soviet behavior in Eastern Europe and Germany was causing the West Europeans and the Americans to combine in a coalition directed against *him*. Stalin imagined one Europe while ensuring, through his actions, that a totally different one would actually evolve.

Then there is Mao Zedong, who now appears to have been a much more committed Marxist-Leninist than previously suspected. Chinese and Soviet sources show him consistently subordinating national to ideological interests: this led him, quite short-sightedly, to suspect the Americans and trust the Russians. It is difficult otherwise to account for Mao's extraordinary deference to his "elder brother" in the Kremlin, his willingness to accept an "unequal treaty" with Moscow, and the massive sacrifices China made in the Korean War. Not until after Stalin's death did an independent Chinese foreign policy emerge; but even that had an ideological basis. It was just that Mao now considered himself to be chief ideologist.

Ideology also helps to explain Stalin's uncharacteristic aggressiveness in the months preceding the Korean War. He interpreted Mao's victory as evidence that the revolutionary tide, contained in Europe, had shifted to Asia. He fell, as a consequence, into a kind of geriatric romanticism, encouraging the Chinese to support insurgencies elsewhere and authorizing Kim Il-sung to attack South Korea. It was as if Stalin chose to celebrate his seventieth year by trying to recapture his revolutionary youth: his ideological vision made him a naive and sentimental as well as a brutal old man.

And lest that pattern seem unique, consider what we now know of Khrushchev, who responded to Castro's revolution in Cuba in much the same way. There could have been little strategic logic in *creating* a Caribbean outpost at least as indefensible as the one the Americans and their allies had *inherited* in

West Berlin. From an ideological perspective, though, Cuba was all-important: it might provide the spark that would set off Marxist uprisings throughout Latin America. There was little hard evidence of such a prospect, but even the possibility—however remote—had an intense *emotional* hold in Moscow. One has the image here, not so much of a Bismarck or even a Lenin, but of aging Ponce de Leons in search of an ideological Fountain of Youth.

The new materials suggest, then, that Kissinger was right about Hitler, and would have been right about Stalin and his successors as well as Mao had he applied to them a similar model of emotionally based ideological romanticism. For there seems to have been something about authoritarians that caused them to lose touch with reality. Being a communist provided no greater safeguard against tilting at windmills than being a fascist. The explanation is not difficult to discern: autocratic systems reinforce, while discouraging attempts to puncture, whatever quixotic illusions may exist at the top.

VI

Why, though, if the Americans had multidimensionality, collaboration, morality, and realism all going for them, did the Cold War last as long as it did? Here the "new" history suggests yet another hypothesis, which is that *nuclear weapons exchanged destructiveness for duration*.

The proposition that nuclear weapons kept the Cold War from getting hot is an old and familiar one, although still not universally accepted.²³ The new technology of warfare is supposed to have created constraints against escalation not previously present, and as a result crises that in other periods would have caused great wars during the Cold War did not. There seems little doubt now that the nuclear revolution indeed had this restraining effect. But there was a price to be paid—even though it was surely worth paying.

If, as suggested above, retaining a diversified power base helped the west win the Cold War—if one triceratops remained healthy while the other slowly sickened—then it would be worth specifying *when* the Soviet Union completed the transition from multi- to monodimensionality. One might have expected this to happen shortly before the struggle ended. But the new evidence indicates—on this point old evidence more carefully analyzed might also have suggested—that the process was virtually complete by the early 1960s. The Cold War went on for another three decades. How come?

This is where nuclear weapons come in, for they encouraged the monodimensional measurement of power. McNamara insisted that a 17-1 advantage for the United States in 1962 still translated into *effective* nuclear parity because the prospect of only a few nuclear explosions on American soil would deter Washington from doing anything that might provoke them. Unconvinced, Soviet leaders used the years that followed to seek actual parity with the United States, and by 1970 they had largely succeeded. But look what was happening

here: both sides had tacitly agreed to calculate their strengths in the particular category of power—if one agrees that the “third world” offered little, the *only* category—in which the Soviet Union could still match the United States. It was as if the ailing triceratops somehow convinced its adversary to focus only on its external appearance, disregarding its reflexes, blood pressure, X-rays, and stool samples.

There developed, as a result, a fixation on the nuclear arms race as the focus of Soviet–American relations. Future generations are sure to wonder at this. Why was so much time spent worrying about intricate numerical balances in categories of weapons no one could use? Or on the negotiation of arms control treaties that reduced no arms? How did the idea ever take hold that security could lie in the deliberate cultivation of mutual vulnerability? That defense was a bad thing?

Not until the Reagan administration would anyone seriously question these orthodoxies—whether it did so out of ignorance or craft is still not clear. What is apparent is that the United States began to challenge the Soviet Union during the first half of the 1980s in a manner unprecedented since the early Cold War. That state soon exhausted itself and expired—whether from unaccustomed over-exertion or Gorbachev’s heroic efforts at resuscitation is also still not completely clear.

Nuclear weapons preserved the image of a formidable Soviet Union long after it had entered into its terminal decline. We will never know whether the USSR could have been successfully—but also safely—confronted at an earlier date; for the Cuban missile crisis convinced western leaders, perhaps correctly, that their own nations’ survival depended upon that of their adversary. Efforts to shake the other side seemed far too dangerous to undertake. There was, therefore, a trade-off: we avoided *destruction*, but at the price of *duration*; the Cold War went on much longer than it might have had nuclear weapons never been invented. Given the fact that they did exist, the Cold War could have ended with a bang at just about any point. It took decades to arrange a whimper.

VII

What is there new to say about the old question of responsibility for the Cold War? Who actually started it? Could it have been averted? Here I think the “new” history is bringing us back to an old answer: that *as long as Stalin was running the Soviet Union a cold war was unavoidable*.

History is always the product of determined *and* contingent events: it is up to historians to find the proper balance between them. The Cold War could hardly have happened if there had not been a United States and a Soviet Union, if both had not emerged victorious from World War II, if they had not had conflicting visions of how to organize the postwar world. But these long-term trends did not in themselves *ensure* such a contest, because there is always room for the

unexpected to undo what might appear to be inevitable. *Nothing* is ever completely predetermined, as real triceratops and other dinosaurs discovered 65 million years ago when the most recent large asteroid or comet or whatever it was hit the earth and wiped them out.

Individuals, not asteroids, more often personify contingency in history. Who can specify in advance—or unravel afterwards—the particular intersection of genetics, environment, and culture that makes each person unique? Who can foresee what weird conjunctions of design and circumstance may cause a very few individuals to rise so high as to shape great events, and so come to the attention of historians? Such people may set their sights on getting to the top, but an assassin, or a bacillus, or even a carelessly driven taxicab can always be lurking along the way. How entire countries fall into the hands of malevolent gnuises like Hitler and Stalin remains as unfathomable in the “new” Cold War history as in the “old.”

Once leaders like these do gain power, however, certain things become highly probable. It is only to be expected that in an authoritarian state the chief authoritarian’s personality will weigh much more heavily than those of democratic leaders, who have to share power. And whether because of social alienation, technological innovation, or economic desperation, the first half of the twentieth century was particularly susceptible to great authoritarians and all that resulted from their ascendancy. It is hardly possible to imagine Nazi Germany or the world war it caused without Hitler. I find it increasingly difficult, given what we know now, to imagine the Soviet Union or the Cold War without Stalin.

For the more we learn, the less sense it makes to distinguish Stalin’s foreign policies from his domestic practices or even his personal behavior. Scientists have shown the natural world to be filled with examples of what they call “self-similarity across scale”: patterns that persist whether one views them microscopically, macroscopically, or anywhere in between.²⁴ Stalin was like that: he functioned in much the same manner whether operating within the international system, within his alliances, within his country, within his party, within his personal entourage, or even within his family. The Soviet leader waged cold wars on all of these fronts. The Cold War we came to know was only one of many from *his* point of view.

Nor did Stalin’s influence diminish as quickly as that of most dictators after their deaths. He built a *system* sufficiently durable to survive not only his own demise but his successors’ fitful and half-hearted efforts at “de-Stalinization.” They were themselves its creatures, and they continued to work within it because they knew no other method of governing. Not until Gorbachev was a Soviet leader fully prepared to dismantle Stalin’s structural legacy. It tells us a lot that as it disappeared, so too did the Cold War and ultimately the Soviet Union itself.

This argument by no means absolves the United States and its allies of a considerable responsibility for how the Cold War was fought—hardly a surprising conclusion since they in fact won it. Nor is it to deny the feckless stupidity with

which the Americans fell into peripheral conflicts like Vietnam, or their exorbitant expenditures on unusable weaponry: these certainly caused the Cold War to cost much more in money and lives than it otherwise might have. Nor is it to claim moral superiority for western statesmen.²⁵ None was as bad as Stalin—or Mao—but the Cold War left no leader uncorrupted: the wielding of great power, even in the best of times, rarely does.

It is the case, though, that if one applies the always useful test of counterfactual history—drop a key variable and speculate as to what difference this might have made—Stalin's centrality to the origins of the Cold War becomes quite clear. For all of their importance, one could have removed Roosevelt, Churchill, Truman, Bevin, Marshall, or Acheson, and a cold war would still have probably followed the world war. If one could have eliminated Stalin, alternative paths become quite conceivable. For with the possible exception of Mao, no twentieth-century leader imprinted himself upon his country as thoroughly and with such lasting effect as Stalin did. And given his personal propensity for cold wars—a tendency firmly rooted long before he had even heard of Harry Truman—once Stalin wound up at the top in Moscow and once it was clear his state would survive the war, then it looks equally clear that there was going to be a Cold War whatever the west did. Who then was responsible? The answer, I think, is authoritarianism in general, and Stalin in particular.

VIII

Finally, how will the Cold War look a hundred years hence? Not as it does today, it seems safe enough to say, just as the Cold War we now know looks different from the one we knew, or thought we knew, while it was going on. It ought to humble historians to recognize how much their views of the past—any past, no matter how distant—reflect the particular present in which they find themselves. We are all, in this sense, *temporal* parochials. There follows, then, one last hypothesis: "*new*" Cold War historians should retain the capacity to be surprised.

It would be foolish for this book or any other to claim definitive conclusions on the basis of the fresh but very incomplete evidence the Cold War's end has placed at our disposal. Surprises are bound to lie ahead, whether from new documents or new perspectives or their interconnections. Revisionism is a healthy historiographical process, and no one, not even revisionists, should be exempt from it.

It would be equally short-sighted to dismiss new evidence solely because it fits—or does not fit—existing interpretations. The temptation, among established Cold War historians, is certainly there.²⁶ Surely we will produce better history, though, if we alter our perspectives to accommodate our sources than if we select from those sources only what sustains our preconceptions. Pre-Darwinian paleontologists insisted for years on the immutability of species despite the fossil evidence that lay before their eyes. Historians who fail to take

new sources seriously risk a similarly antiquated commitment to the immutability of theses.

"Triumphalism" too can mislead.²⁷ To the extent that it reviews what the west did right during the Cold War—as well as what it did wrong—it is a valid historical method, since otherwise one would be hard-pressed to explain why the Cold War ended as decisively as it did. But when "triumphalism" fosters complacency, it goes too far. It obscures the fact that victories, more often than not, carry within themselves the seeds of their own undoing. Enemies may disappear but historical processes rarely do: self-congratulation can get in the way of seeing what these are, where they are going, and what they may portend.

Just because market capitalism and democratic politics triumphed during the Cold War is no guarantee that they will continue to do so. Capitalism still distributes wealth and status unevenly, as Marx said it did. Democracy still gives voice to the alienation that results: people do not necessarily vote the way economists think. Where did communism and fascism come from in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—to say nothing of the great reform movements in the United States and Western Europe—if not from a clash of unregulated markets with an expanding political franchise? And yet the post-Cold War world has seen an unprecedented push for economic integration and political self-determination, with almost no thought given to how each might relate to the other.²⁸

It is, therefore, too soon to write authoritarianism's obituary. Despite the setbacks it suffered during the Cold War, that form of government has a much longer history than does democracy. It would be temporally parochial in the extreme to conclude that its day is done. If Marxism-Leninism generated so many internal contradictions that it ultimately collapsed, why should we regard democratic capitalism as exempt from similar tendencies? How do we know we are not living within a long historical cycle, one that may sweep us back to a world of authoritarians—although almost certainly not of the Marxist-Leninist variety—all over again?

And yet—surprises happen. There are instances in which historical ecology itself shifts, in which behavior that has flourished for as far back as we can detect suddenly ceases to do so. Bad habits, like ill-adapted life-forms, do sometimes become extinct. This happened to slavery and dueling during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and it may be happening to great-power war as the twentieth century draws to a close.²⁹ Stephen Jay Gould, a post-Darwinian paleontologist who takes a *very* long view, likes to tell of a particular species of fish which flourished for millions upon millions of years, all of that time superbly in tune with its environment—until the pond dried up.³⁰

It may be that the west prevailed during the Cold War not so much because of the success of its institutions or the wisdom of its leaders—although surely there was some of both—as because that conflict just happened to take place at the moment in history when the conditions that had for thousands of years favored authoritarianism suddenly ceased to do so. Perhaps (let us hope so) the pond simply dried up.