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THREAT PERCEPTIONS

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The Genesis of Soviet Threat Perceptions

Executive Summary

It is an axiom of Western politics that the actions of the Soviet Union created the cold war. So entrenched is this judgment that it carries a corollary with it: Soviet leaders must realize that the resistance of the West--the practice and philosophy of containment--is an inevitable result of their commitment to expansionism. It is difficult in Western perspective to imagine that Soviet leaders could seriously doubt this understanding of the past, however firmly the Soviets may deny it for the sake of public justification.

The historical record suggests, however, that the Soviet Union neither intended nor anticipated the intense rivalry that developed. In the wake of World War II, Stalin saw a resurgent Germany in fifteen to twenty years time as the principal threat to Russia, and he sought to preserve a collaborative relationship with the United States as a means of containing the threat. It was not until 1947-48 that he acknowledged belatedly and reluctantly that the primary threat was an ideologically hostile coalition led by the Anglo-Saxon powers.

This evolution of Soviet perspectives very likely has strong contemporary resonance. In 1969 the Soviets again committed themselves to a policy of collaborating with the United States and in 1983 they apparently concluded that such a policy was not feasible. Whether they have also acknowledged, as Stalin did, that the United States poses an imminent danger and whether they will in some measure repeat Stalin's highly belligerent reactions are questions of major significance, and they require cool-headed assessment. However firmly we may reject the ultimate validity of Soviet perspectives, it is distinctly dangerous to misperceive what they in fact are.

Relevance of the Study

The lineaments of the East-West military confrontation emerged in 1948-53 period and have endured to the present. Western perceptions of the Soviet threat were largely formed at this period and the grounds for those perceptions were cogently argued in National Security Council document No. 68 of April 1950. This assessment of Soviet objectives and motivations continues to inform an influential body of American opinion, and since 1980 that opinion has largely shaped U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union.

The evidence was quite clear to Western eyes at the time. In Eastern Europe, the Soviets were working to establish communist dependencies rather than representative governments. In Germany they were concentrating on extracting reparations and in the process obstructing U.S. efforts at rehabilitation. Following the foundation of the Cominform in September 1947 and the pronouncement by Zhdanov of the "two camps" doctrine, violent communist-led strikes threatened political stability in France and Italy, and there was a heightening of communist terror in Eastern Europe. The Berlin blockade began in 1948 and Czechoslovakia fell under communist rule that same year. South Korea was invaded in 1950.

What is missing from this description is the fact that the "two camps" doctrine represented a fundamental shift in Soviet policy towards the West. The collaborative relationship built up during the war between Britain, America and the Soviet Union was seen by Stalin as being greatly in Soviet interests and he had hoped that it would endure in peacetime. The "two camps" doctrine (which echoed the imagery of the Truman doctrine announced six months earlier), acknowledged that this hope was dead. Until then, the Soviets had focused on the threat of a resurgent Germany in fifteen to twenty years time. Soviet attention now shifted to the threat of war with a capitalist coalition led by the Anglo-Saxon powers.

Given the opposing interests and the political philosophies of the allies, it was almost inevitable that the wartime relationship would not endure. But since contemporary Western assessments of Soviet intentions have their roots in the period, it is important to understand what underlay Soviet behavior at this time. And, without imputing blame, one also needs to know that it was the Anglo-Saxon allies who, by mid-1946, had concluded that they were effectively at war with the Soviet Union. Stalin resisted this development, shifting reluctantly from the wartime entente achieved with Roosevelt, to the rapidly deteriorating detente of 1945-47, and only accepted the inevitability of cold war in mid-1947. Many Soviet actions, intended by Stalin to be compatible with collaboration, or later moves that were responding to the new confrontation, appeared to the West to reflect a Soviet preference for confrontation. This perception was erroneous.

Soviet Threat Perceptions Prior to 1947

If the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk had been fully implemented, central Europe and the western parts of Russia would have been turned into a German preserve. Fortunately for the Soviets, Germany was defeated on the Western Front eight months later. Within twenty years, a more virulent form of German nationalism was resurgent and in 1939 Hitler embarked on a program of armed conquest. To buy time to arm and space for defense, the Soviets negotiated a non-aggression treaty with the Nazis, but the inevitable invasion came in 1941. It penetrated one thousand miles into Russia, causing massive devastation.

It was therefore natural that the post-war threat was visualized as a revitalized Germany, with the possibility of Japan in the rear. The Soviets were not alone in their appreciation and at this time the primary concern of most members of the grand alliance was how to prevent a future resurgence of German aggression. The Soviet answer was to dismantle Germany's military-industrial base and destroy its war-making capacity; to make use of German reparations in rebuilding the Soviet economy and modernizing its armed forces; and to establish a protective barrier of Soviet-oriented buffer states.

With some reservations, Roosevelt and Churchill had been sympathetic to this approach. They acquiesced to the adjustment of Russia's western frontiers, accepted the inevitability of Soviet leadership in eastern Europe and even recognized Russia's interests in the Turkish Straits. They had also accepted the need to physically disable Germany, and the Morgenthau plan to pastoralize the country would have required the wholesale destruction of industry. That plan was resisted by the Soviet Union, since it would preclude reparations from current production. Reparations had been set loosely at about \$20 billion in ten years, to be paid in kind rather than cash.

As the war neared its end, the portents were favorable. The Red army had been welcomed by Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia as liberators. The Western allies had spurned German proposals for a separate peace. The wartime leadership of the "Big Three" had been institutionalized in the Security Council of the United Nations. There was talk of the complementarity of Russia's need for reconstruction investment and America's need for markets and raw materials. And U.S. troops were expected to be withdrawn from Europe within two years.

The portents were not fulfilled. By the fall of 1945, U.S. policy towards Germany had swung from repression to rehabilitation, and the primary concern was to prevent Germany from being a charge on the American taxpayer. The Soviets persisted with the policy of using reparations to disable Germany and contribute to Russian reconstruction, as did France. These conflicting approaches were a source of mounting friction with the Anglo-Saxon partners. Soviet policy in Eastern Europe was another major source of friction, as Stalin sought to ensure the emergence of governments that were favorably disposed towards Russia. Meanwhile the United Nations, which was dominated by the Western powers, has become an arena for acerbic confrontation as the West sought to use it to thwart Soviet policies.

The Soviets were not prepared to make major concessions on the vital issues of German reparations and the political complexion of Eastern Europe, issues that had been agreed in the wartime negotiations. Elsewhere they sought to be conciliatory, in the hope of preserving some vestige of the wartime collaborative relationship. This included immediate agreement to withdraw from Czechoslovakia, the denial of aid to the communist side of the civil war in Greece, which had widespread popular support, pressure on Tito to make concessions to

Italy over Trieste, and withdrawal from northern Iran, albeit two months behind schedule.

Stalin persisted in this approach despite the mounting evidence of a fundamental shift in U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union that began to emerge in March 1946. A year later, the Foreign ministers' meeting on the German and Austrian peace treaties would have made it clear that the Anglo-Saxons were not interested in compromise. It was not, however, until the meeting at the end of June 1947 to discuss how to handle the U.S.-funded European Recovery Program that the Soviets decided that the breach was irreparable. The program was seen as an ambitious scheme to lure the participants into a binding relationship with the West by integrating their economies into the capitalist bloc.

Reviewing the Situation

Soviet political analysts had been talking for some time of competing tendencies in Britain and America, one prepared to continue with the wartime system of tripartite compromise and agreement, and the other set on world domination by the Anglo-Saxon powers. The imperialistic tendency had clearly prevailed and Churchill's speech at Fulton, Missouri had been nothing less than a call for continued Anglo-Saxon domination and for a crusade against Russia. This threw a different light on Britain's attempt in the 1930s to direct Hitler's ambitions eastwards; on the two year delay in launching a second front; and on the secret development of the atom bomb and the attempt to prevent the Soviets from developing their own.

This perspective also explained why America and Britain, despite the wartime understandings, had hampered the establishment of a Soviet-oriented buffer zone and prevented Soviet involvement in the defense of the Turkish Straits. It explained the shift from reparations to rehabilitation in Germany and the speed with which American policy towards its erstwhile enemies moved from hostility to one of friendship. But Italy, Germany and Japan weren't just ex-opponents; they were the three founding members of the Anti-Comintern Pact, and two of them were long standing enemies of Russia.

Other evidence was equally ominous. The movement towards Western European unity was being militarized and would be extended to include the United States and Canada, which foreshadowed the rearming of Western Germany. By 1946, German generals were at work analyzing their experiences fighting the Russians, and Gehlen was providing the U.S. army with intelligence on Russia and Eastern Europe; meanwhile the U.S. army was recruiting potential leaders of partisan forces from the refugee camps, including former Soviet citizens. By the end of 1948 evidence was accumulating that the United States was developing a new capability to provoke and support political unrest in Russia and Eastern Europe. Back in the United States, Congress had appropriated

funds for building up the air force to 70 groups in five years, and the Americans were becoming gradually inured to the idea that war with Russia was inevitable.

The Threat to Russia

On the basis of this evidence and the thrust of American statements, the Soviets would have seen three kinds of threat. The most immediate was an air strike against Soviet atomic development facilities; this would become acute following the first test in August 1949. A threat to the Soviet-oriented governments in Eastern Europe would reach fruition in about 1953-54, comprising the land armies of France and Germany, backed by Anglo-Saxon air and naval power. The third kind of threat stemmed from the American objective of bringing about a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet state. This could only happen as the result of war between the two social systems, a war that was most likely to emerge from one of the other two contingencies, but might be initiated deliberately.

In 1948 the Soviets halted the postwar rundown of their forces and embarked on a major rearmament program. The two sides' threat perceptions mirrored each other and both saw the 1953-54 period as the critical years. The Korean War reinforced each side's perceptions although for different reasons. In Soviet eyes, its most notable feature was that it was used by the Anglo-Saxon powers to strengthen the structure of the NATO alliance, to justify very sharp increases in defense expenditures, and to initiate the process of bringing a rearmed Germany into the Western alliance.

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The Genesis of Soviet Threat Perceptions

Western perceptions of the Soviet threat have their roots in the 1945-50 period. It was during those years that the public indictment of Soviet Union was firmly established. That period saw the Soviet subjugation of Eastern Europe, Zhadnov's announcement of the "two camps doctrine," the blockade of Berlin, and the invasion of South Korea. It was towards the end of that period that the claim first emerged that the Soviets' military capability greatly exceeded its requirements for defense.

The Western claim that Soviet military capability is far in excess of its legitimate needs for defense has persisted through to the present and is an important factor in assessing Soviet intentions and the role of military force in Soviet foreign policy. The claim is, however, no more than an assertion, and little consideration has been given to how the Soviets might themselves assess their essential defense requirements. And while there have been numerous studies of the origins of the cold war, little attention has been paid to how the Soviets' own threat perceptions would have been shaped by the events of 1945-50.

It tends to be forgotten that in 1945 the universal concern of the wartime allies was to prevent a resurgence of German and Japanese

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aggression, and this remained the focus of Soviet policy. By the spring of 1946, however, the argument had prevailed in America (and, to a lesser extent, in Britain) that the more urgent threat lay in Soviet military domination of Europe. It is now clear that the Western partners grossly overestimated Soviet political and military strength and that even if the Soviets had had the urge to take over Western Europe (which hindsight suggests they didn't), they certainly lacked the capability to do so. It was largely because of this inherent weakness that Stalin sought to preserve the remaining shreds of the collaborative wartime relationship, despite the sharp shift in Western policy that became increasingly evident during 1946. It was not until the summer of 1947 that the Soviets turned to reassess the threat, shifting their focus from a resurgent Germany in fifteen to twenty years time, to a capitalist coalition led by the English-speaking powers that would be ready for war in five to six years. Western Germany and Japan would be part of that coalition, hence the gravity and the immediacy of the threat were sharply heightened.

Soviet perceptions of threat in the 1980s have their roots in the reassessment that took place in 1947-48. To understand the present day policies and motivations of the Soviet Union one must appreciate the reasons that led to the 1947-48 reassessment and to be aware of the evidence on which the Soviet estimate of Western intentions was based. The approach in this study has been first to establish the nature of Soviet threat perceptions as World War II drew to a close and the Allies began to grapple with the problems of peace. And then to reevaluate the evidence of this period from the perspective of 1947-48.

This analysis makes very little use of Soviet source material, for two reasons. It is extremely difficult to distinguish between rhetorical statements and genuine Soviet concerns, and such judgments are always controversial. And second, the Soviets have always been reluctant to acknowledge publicly the weaknesses that must be taken account of in their threat assessments. In such circumstances, Soviet statements concerning their "perceptions" are in general no more to be relied on than contemporary Western statements concerning Soviet "intentions." One must therefore distinguish between the flow of events, with its backdrop of Western commentary and official statements, and the way this data is likely to have been interpreted (and reinterpreted) by the Soviets.

For the historical record of events and contemporary pronouncements, reliance has been placed on generally accepted and well-established Western analyses of the period. This evidence, which is limited to the data that would have been available to the Soviets at the time and does not include information from U.S. documents that have subsequently been declassified, has been evaluated as though through the eyes of a policymaker in Moscow. Little emphasis has been placed on ideology or Soviet doctrine, because the focus is on a shift in threat perceptions, whereas ideology and doctrine remained constant through the period. Marxist doctrine concerning the inevitability of war between capitalism and socialism would certainly have colored the reevaluation that took place in 1947-48, but it did not prompt it, nor was it a necessary component. The objective factors were sufficient to have forced this reassessment; it was the tardiness of the Soviet reaction to these developments that was surprising.

The story told in this study is deliberately biased to the Soviet viewpoint, reflecting how they are likely to have perceived the consistency of their own policies and the legitimacy of their behavior. It is necessary to understand this viewpoint, because the second world war and its aftermath remained a major reference point for Soviet policymakers, at least through the beginning of the 1980s. The continued relevance of the post-war period is reinforced by the fact that the evolution of Soviet policy that took place between 1945 and 1948 may have been repeated in 1978-85. In both cases the Soviet Union recognized belatedly that the collaborative relationship with the United States by which they set such store had failed. In the earlier case, the Soviets moved to a policy of active confrontation. Today, there are more options available to Soviet policymakers and they are more sophisticated in their understanding of world affairs. It is too early to identify the full consequences of the Soviets' belated acceptance in September 1983 that Soviet-American detente was dead, but Western analysts need to be sensitive to the possibility of a major change in underlying policy.

The permitted length of this study and the breadth of the subject has meant foregoing the long explanatory footnotes and the contemporary quotations that were used to support the historical overview in the original draft of this report, which was four times as long. References have been limited to a few quotations in the text, but a bibliography of the sources used in preparing this report is appended.

The Background to Soviet Threat Perceptions

Defense of the homeland is the irreducible core of any national strategy. For Russia, sprawled across 170 degrees of the Eurasian continent, territorial defense looms large and Soviet perceptions of threat were shaped as much by their historical experience as by an objective evaluation of the forces ranged against them.

The Lessons of War: 1917-43

In the three years following the Bolshevik seizure of power, Russia first suffered invasion and partial dismemberment at the hands of the Germans and their proteges, and was then plunged into three years of civil war. This war included armed intervention by significant British, French, Japanese and American forces, and a coordinated attack by Polish and Ukrainian armies.

During the first twelve months of the Soviet regime, Germany dominated the external concerns of the Soviet leadership. If the punitive treaty of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918), had been fully implemented, eastern Europe and the westernmost parts of Russia would have been turned into a German preserve through a system of satellite states and economic exploitation. But it was not only the Germans who were eager to dismember Russia. The assault by Poland and its Ukrainian allies in the spring of 1920 revived the threat of an independent and unfriendly Ukraine, and raised the spectre of the great Polish-Lithuanian state as it existed prior to 1772. Although the Red Army repelled the assault and moved onto the offensive, its advance was turned back at the gates of Warsaw and, at the time of the armistice in October 1920, about half of Byelorussia and a substantial part of the Ukraine was once again behind Polish lines.

The British, meanwhile, had moved into the Trans-Caucasus, where they already had oil interests, coming overland through Persia and by ship through the Black Sea; in the east, Japan stood ready to annex great tracts of Siberia. The Allied intervention, orchestrated and led by Great Britain, confirmed the latter's role as the bulwark of the capitalist world and communist Russia's main enemy. But the intervention also demonstrated the inability of the capitalist states, war weary and pursuing their separate and conflicting interests, to combine effectively to overthrow the Revolution.

The Soviets recognized that the United States was now the economically dominant capitalist power, but they saw America's capability as offering the means of counter-balancing Japanese aspirations on the Asian mainland, and British imperial ambitions world wide. Unlike the other major capitalist states, America had enjoyed almost uninterrupted good relations with tsarist Russia. It had welcomed the March 1917 revolution without reservation and, after the October coup, was generally in favor of allowing the Russian people to arrange their affairs without interference. America was seen as the least imperialist and belligerent of the capitalist bloc, and its people most amenable to democratic arguments. Meanwhile, the Communists (particularly Lenin) were explicit in their admiration of American efficiency and spirit of enterprise, and there was a sense that some complementarity existed between the interests of the two states. Good relations with the United States and concern for American reactions was an important element of foreign policy under Stalin in the inter-war years.

The civil war and its attendant troubles were effectively at an end by the spring of 1921, and in 1928 the First Five Year Plan was launched as a

forced industrialization program. It is unlikely that the Soviet leadership saw war as being imminent at that time, but the wider perception of threat was captured by Stalin in February 1931 when he rejected the option of slowing the pace of industrialization, because "to slacken the pace would mean to lag behind and those who lag behind are beaten." Old Russia had been beaten by the Tartar Khans, the Turks, the Swedes, the Poles and the Japanese, and the Anglo-French capitalists, and "she was beaten because of her backwardness, because of her military, cultural, political and industrial backwardness."¹

Meanwhile, more immediate threats began to gather. The early 1930s saw the impotence of the other Great Powers in the face of Japan's occupation of Manchuria, an initiative that posed a serious threat to Russian interests in Asia. By the end of 1933, the Soviet leadership had belatedly grasped the implications of Hitler's rise to power and realized that National Socialism was not only a force to be reckoned with, but one that was highly antagonistic to the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, a full scale arms race had gotten underway between all the Great Powers; the Berlin-Rome Axis was established in October 1936, followed in November by the explicitly "Anti-Comintern Pact" between Germany and Japan, with Italy joining twelve months later. Whereas Stalin had hoped that the Soviet Union would be able to stand back (but profit) from the conflicts that would inevitably arise between capitalist states, it now looked as if Russia would be the object of a concerted attack on two fronts.

Stalin's immediate concern was to prevent Hitler from achieving a rapprochement with Britain and France, and if possible to persuade the

1 I. V. Stalin, Sochineniya, (Moscow, 1955) v. 13, pp. 38-39.

British and French to join the Soviet Union in blocking further aggression by the Axis, exploiting the League of Nations if feasible. However, the Western Powers' feeble performance during the 1938 Czechoslovakian crisis strengthened the Soviet suspicion that some people in London and Paris would not be unhappy to see Hitler's further aggression directed eastward. This suspicion was reinforced in 1939 by the Western Powers' dilatory approach to reaching agreement with Russia on deterring a German assault on Poland. After Munich, the Soviets had therefore pursued the twin objectives of redirecting Germany aggression back towards the Western Powers, and of developing the means of delaying and then buffering a German invasion, should Hitler still turn east.

Stalin was remarkably successful in achieving these objectives, external developments being exploited with skillful if ruthless diplomacy. Germany had to make significant concessions in order to get the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact. As soon as the Polish army had been destroyed by Germany as a fighting force, Russia moved to take over the territory lying east of the Curzon Line, the population of the area being predominantly Byelorussian and Ukrainian. These areas were incorporated into the corresponding Soviet republics and their inhabitants purged of the more untrustworthy elements.

Within twelve months, after an unsuccessful attempt to establish a more traditional sphere of influence in the region, a similar process had been applied to the Baltic states (which had been Russian territory prior to 1917), the extra depth making the fragile difference between failure and success to the coming defense of Leningrad. Less satisfactorily, the Isthmus of Karelia (again, Russian territory before the Revolution) was

wrested from Finland at the cost of some 50,000 dead, although the three month campaign did serve the unintended purpose of exposing glaring deficiencies in the Soviet military machine. Meanwhile, as a byproduct of Germany's betrayal of the Anti-Comintern Pact and the evident success of Soviet arms in battle, Russia was able to negotiate the cessation of the undeclared but substantial war with Japan on its eastern borders.

The time between the German invasions of Poland and of Russia, a period of almost 22 months, was characterized by machiavellian twists and turns as Stalin balanced the requirements to gain time and space against the danger of provoking Hitler to launch an attack. Space was important, both to increase the depth of defense and to incorporate within Soviet borders those ethnic groups which Hitler might otherwise exploit to prise away portions of Russia, as he had done elsewhere. The Ukraine was particularly vulnerable in this respect, hence Stalin's insistence on retrieving Bessarabia from Rumania and the annexation of northern Bukovina. Time was desperately needed if Soviet industry was to build up the military capacity to deter a German assault or, if that failed, to absorb the attack. The unexpected collapse of the Western Powers in June 1940 denied Russia a critical breathing space, and it was the vital importance of an extra year's production which probably caused Stalin to miscalculate so badly in June 1941 as he attempted to finesse the 6-8 week "invasion window" by avoiding any possible provocation, such as a defense mobilization.

The results of this miscalculation were disastrous, and the Soviets lost one million casualties and two million prisoners during the first four months of the war. Nevertheless, 16 months later the Russians had recovered sufficiently to stem the German advance at Stalingrad, and by the

spring of 1943 the fortunes of war were moving steadily in the Soviet's favor.

The impressions created by this experience reinforced the lessons of the 1914-20 period. First, Germany was again the source of a mortal threat, resurgent and seemingly all-powerful within 20 years of a humiliating defeat. But there were also other countries eager to lend a hand in dismembering Russia, including Hungary and Rumania.

Second, a secure defense of the homeland called for very large forces. At the outbreak of hostilities in June 1941, there were 188 Soviet divisions on the Western front compared to the Axis' 166, and by August the Soviets had fielded 260, yet they still suffered defeat in the field. The Red Army had 24,000 tanks compared to the Axis' 2434, yet within three months they had lost 17,500, compared to the Axis 550; the Axis started with 1300 aircraft (rising later to 3000) compared to the Soviets 10,000, of which they lost 8000 within three months. Nor could these results be attributed entirely to the German army's greater experience; the Germans had been numerically inferior in men and tanks when its still inexperienced troops defeated the Western Allies in May the previous year.

Third, the importance of the strategic offensive, even if it entailed preemption. One reason was military, enshrined in "the initiative" as a key principal of war. The other reason was political, reflecting the importance of waging war on enemy territory rather than one's own. Although the Soviet Union's political cohesion in the face of extreme military adversity was remarkable, the leaders' fears concerning the political reliability of various ethnic groups in border regions had been fulfilled. Notwithstanding their abominable treatment by the German

occupation authorities, several divisions were raised from members of such dissident groups who had been taken prisoners of war, to fight with the Axis against the Soviet Union.

Fourth, the importance of space. Axis forces advanced 600 miles in four months on their whole front, and were only held at the very outskirts of Moscow. They were finally checked in August 1942, when their southern armies had advanced some 1000 miles. Leningrad would certainly have fallen to the Germans if they had not had to cover 400 miles before launching their assault. Distance was itself a defense.

Fifth, the need to be sufficiently strong on all fronts. Although Stalin had managed to negotiate the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact in April 1941, the final direction of Japan's expansionist drive had still remained uncertain. It was only when the Japanese had committed their ground forces to the conquest of South East Asia, embroiling the Americans in the process, that Russia could relax its guard in the east and redeploy the forces, without which the victory at Stalingrad would have been in doubt. The Soviets could not count on such timely good fortune in a future conflict.

And sixth, World War II vindicated the very high priority given by Stalin to building up Russia's military-industrial base. The Russian success depended on a massive flow of arms and equipment from the factories to the front, and while American lend-lease contributed to this flow, it also underlined the need for a vast indigenous production capacity.

The Wartime Alliance

Soviet perceptions of the probable threat environment once victory was achieved were strongly influenced by the pattern of inter-allied relationships during the war. In most respects, these confirmed the impressions of the inter-war years. There was a great deal of evidence of disagreement and potential hostility between America and Britain and while the two nations joined effectively to wage war against Germany, their interests seemed too divergent to allow the capitalist powers to combine and turn on communism once victory was achieved.

Stalin appears to have felt a personal rapport with Roosevelt. The roots of this rapport may have lain in Roosevelt's success in obtaining diplomatic recognition of the Soviet Union in the first year of his Presidency, but it was certainly fostered by Roosevelt's belief in the efficacy of personal diplomacy. Furthermore, Roosevelt seemed to conform to the rather favorable Soviet stereotype of American attitudes and opinion. He shared their deep suspicion of British imperialism. He warned Stalin that Congress would be unlikely to allow U.S. troops to remain in Europe once the war was over, thus reinforcing Litvinov's original assessment (in 1933) that the United States desired to remain aloof from all active interest in international affairs. And he appeared sympathetic to Soviet aspirations. By the end of 1943, Roosevelt had cautiously indicated that Stalin could count on a free hand in Eastern Europe. He even acknowledged Soviet interests in Poland and the Baltic states, and although the U.S. government refused to recognize the frontiers established in 1939-40, Roosevelt left the impression that his primary concern there was to avoid any US domestic political repercussions, anyway until after the Presidential election in 1944. It was, in fact, generally accepted

within the U.S. Government that Russia would take such steps as necessary to ensure its territorial security.

Stalin did not establish the same kind of rapport with Churchill, although he had a great respect for the man. Churchill conformed to the Soviet stereotype of British imperial aspirations and his advocacy of military intervention to destroy the Bolshevik revolution at birth was well known. The fact that British pragmatism meant one could do business with him, as in the agreement over spheres of influence in the Balkans, did not affect the long held Soviet belief that the British empire was the mortal foe of Communism. This belief was reinforced by British policy in Greece in the wake of the Axis withdrawal in October 1944. This policy included the imposed restoration of the monarchy, the forcible suppression of a left wing uprising and the exclusion of left wing resistance groups from the government. But Stalin accepted British hegemony in western Europe in return for Soviet hegemony in the eastern part. It is unlikely that Stalin ever considered that the British, on their own, could pose a serious threat to the Soviet homeland.

Meanwhile, the allies' wartime relationship was reassuring. From the outset, the Soviets had been explicit that besides the defeat of the Axis, their main concern was to resolve the question of their western frontiers and, despite procrastination, these territorial adjustments were acceded to by the two Western partners. But the allies accommodating stance extended beyond this.

In October 1944, Churchill agreed that a regime more favorable to Russia should govern the Turkish Straits. Stalin had compared Russia's interests in the Turkish Straits to Britain's interests in Gibraltar and

the Suez Canal, and the United States' in Panama, and Churchill was receptive to his argument. Roosevelt concurred in this at Yalta, and the need for a fundamental revision of the Montreux Convention was endorsed by the Great Powers at Potsdam.

The Western Allies were less forthcoming over Iran, nevertheless the signs were not inauspicious. Russian interests in northern Persia were longstanding and had been formalized in the 1907 convention with Britain defining spheres of interest, and the 1921 Soviet-Iranian treaty. In August 1941, Britain and the Soviet Union (by mutual agreement and with a coordinated drive), had occupied Iran, giving the Russians control of the area to the north of latitude 35 N (running through Tehran) and the British everything to the south. There was much jockeying for long term advantage between the "protecting" powers, and the Soviets sought to obtain comparable oil concessions in the five northern provinces to those already enjoyed or being acquired by Britain and America in the south. They were unsuccessful regarding oil, but the Soviets did make significant progress in gaining political influence amongst the nationalist minorities in their area. British efforts to counter these encroachments were ineffective, while the United States tended to ignore them, giving the impression that U.S. interests in the area were primarily commercial, not political, and fostering an impression of tacit acquiescence.

The conclusions to be drawn from the allied relationship were therefore generally positive, although there remained grounds for concern. The most serious was the two-year delay in launching the second front. The Western partners' reluctance to make a "blood sacrifice" while the Soviets bore the brunt of the war against Nazi Germany, fostered Soviet suspicions that

their capitalist allies would like to arrange matters so that Russia and Germany fought each other to the death, while the Western powers built up their military and economic capacity whereby to dominate the post-war world.

These suspicions were reinforced by fears that the capitalist partners would negotiate a separate peace in the west, allowing the Germans to hold Russia in the east. Always latent, these fears surfaced when Italy withdrew from the war in 1943 and the Western partners unilaterally accepted the surrender of Italian forces. They increased rapidly during the spring of 1945 when various German elements started putting out peace feelers to the West and reached a peak in March at the time of the Anglo-American negotiations over the surrender of German forces in Italy, when the Western allies refused a Soviet request to participate.

But these doubts and suspicions reflected fears that the capitalist partners would cheat Russia of the full fruits of a victory in a war where the Soviets had borne the bulk of the burden. They were not directly relevant to Soviet threat perceptions as the conflict drew to a close.

Threat Perceptions in 1944-45

As victory drew near the dominant concern among most of the allies was the potential resurgence of a powerful Germany in 15-20 years time. Stalin was obsessed by the thought of a future German revenge and returned to the theme with most of his numerous visitors in the Kremlin. But the more immediate prospects were not unfavorable. Roosevelt and Churchill had shown that they were mindful of Soviet security concerns, and it appeared likely that the wartime entente, formalized through permanent membership of the

U.N. Security Council, would endure into the peace. Given the right attitudes, this could provide the means of "preventing new aggression or a new war, if not for ever, then at least for an extended time."²

This did not imply that Stalin had changed his mind about the fundamental conflict between capitalism and communism, or believed that either Britain or America were friendly disposed towards a communist Soviet Union. The international system remained inherently hostile but for the time being (at least) he perceived a congruence of "vitally important and long-lasting interests" in avoiding war. The United States seemed set on withdrawing all its forces to North America, and its continuing aversion to the European style of traditional power politics and its reluctance to become involved in European problems, made an Anglo-American coalition unlikely. It even offered the possibility that the USA might be induced to check British machinations, if not to support Soviet interests.

In many ways, therefore, the threat situation in 1944-45 resembled that facing the new Soviet state in the 1920s as it finally emerged from World War I and the aftermath of revolution and civil war. America was seen as sympathetic to Soviet problems, it had offered to make long-term credits for post-war reconstruction and other projects, and the complementarity of the two economies had reemerged as the possible basis for economic cooperation. It seemed that the United States did not want to remain politically involved on the Eurasian continent, except in China, while the other major actors had been devastated by the war, with the partial exception of Great Britain. There were of course two major differences to

2 I. V. Stalin, Sochineniya, (Stanford: Hoover Institute, 1967) vol. 2, pp. 164-170.

the 1920s: the Soviet Union's geostrategic position was significantly improved; and the Americans had the atom bomb. But all in all, the similarities predominated, not least the devastation wrought on the Soviet political economy by four years of war.

Guarding Against Future German Aggression

Given these similar circumstances, it is not surprising that Soviet military requirements as perceived in 1944-45 were essentially the same as those formulated in the inter-war years, with the additional need to match America's atomic monopoly. The requirement to rebuild the military-industrial base was paramount. Deficiencies in the existing inventory of equipment had to be made up, motorized transport being among the most glaring. But there had also been substantial advances in the technology of warfare, little of which had been applied in the Soviet Union which fought the war using mid-thirties (and older) technology. Russia could not afford to lag behind in this respect, because as Stalin said in 1931, "those who lag behind are beaten," and much of the Soviet armed forces needed rebuilding from scratch.

The time-horizon was 15-20 years; the most likely enemy, Germany in the west and Japan in the east. Both countries had warred against Russia twice in the last 40 years, each had imposed one crushing defeat and Germany had almost succeeded in inflicting two. Besides modernizing Soviet military capability, the German threat could be countered in three ways. Stalin rejected the option of collective security, which had failed so disastrously in the 1930s, in favor of the two more concrete approaches. One was to establish a protective barrier of Soviet-oriented buffer states.

The other was to impose punitive reparations, which would dismantle Germany's military-industrial base and destroy its war-making capacity.

Providing Defense in Depth

Stalin was fully aware that the post-war settlement process would involve very tough bargaining, and while he undoubtedly hoped that the wartime agreements between the "Big Three" would provide the basis for negotiations, he was conscious that the key factors would be troops on the ground and economic power. Stalin would not, therefore, have been unduly perturbed by the denial of any effective Soviet role in the occupation of Italy. The exclusion of Soviet forces from the occupation of Japan was more disturbing, given the latter's role as a traditional enemy of Russia, but it was acceptable since the Soviets had been able to repossess Sakhalin and the Kuriles, and take over the four southernmost islands of the chain, which had never belonged to Russia. Similarly, it is unlikely that Stalin really expected that the Soviet Union would be allowed to assume the trusteeship of Libya, or take over the Dodecanese in the Aegean. As concerns the Turkish Straits, while he would have been heartened by Churchill's promises, he would not have been surprised when the Western powers walked back on their more extensive commitments, given the history of this issue during World War I and its aftermath.

In fact, Stalin had already conceded potential access to the Mediterranean when he supported the Western partners in requiring Bulgarian forces to withdraw from western Thrace in September 1944. And he had agreed to this, even though Soviet troops were already in Sofia and British forces had yet to land in Greece. Iran in March 1946 was a somewhat similar case,

since the Soviets had troops on the ground and the local political situation and the relative military balance made it perfectly feasible for the Soviets to disregard completely the agreement to withdraw. The fact that the Soviets did withdraw (albeit two months late) illustrated Stalin's willingness to forgo comparatively important potential gains in his pursuit of the vanishing entente between the big three, which he saw as serving Russia's wider interests.

This willingness did not, however, extend across the board, and Stalin's geostrategic priorities were reflected in his stance on various European issues. Soviet forces that had advanced some 250 miles in northern Norway were withdrawn promptly, and Stalin forebore to occupy Finland, despite the fact that it had been an Autonomous Duchy of the Russian empire between 1809 and 1917, and had joined Germany against Russia in 1941. He chose instead to adhere in the main to the relatively moderate territorial provisions of 1940, which were intended to protect Leningrad's maritime flank and to cover the naval base complex on the Kola Peninsular. The Baltic provinces were less fortunate, and were reincorporated into the Soviet state, since they provided maritime access to the central Russian plain and land access to Leningrad.

The continued existence of a Polish state was, however, respected, the long history of Polish rebellions probably arguing against its reincorporation. The state's confines were moved bodily west (so as to exclude Byelorussian and Ukrainian ethnic groups), and Stalin insisted on a Polish government that would be compliant to Soviet wishes, a condition that was accepted (albeit reluctantly) by both Churchill and Roosevelt. They could not ignore the fact that this territory had served as the

springboard for three major invasions of Russia in the previous thirty years (plus Napoleon's invasion in 1812), and that in the years to come, the role of Poland as a buffer state against a resurgent Germany could be crucial to Soviet security.

To the south of Poland lay three countries which, in the pursuit of their separate interests, had been willing allies of the Germans. Rumania had served as the southern springboard for Hitler's invasion and had provided some 30 divisions and incurred nearly half a million casualties against the Russians, as it sought to extend the Rumanian frontier to the River Bug. Although Bulgaria had not declared war against the Soviet Union nor sent troops to fight there, it had allowed the German navy to use its ports and was strategically placed in relation to the Black Sea exits. Hungary joined the Axis in November 1940 and its troops fought against Yugoslavia as well as the Soviets, while its transportation system was essential to the supply of both the Balkan and the Russian fronts.

Stalin did not consider control of these countries as crucial to Soviet security as control of those to the north. Nevertheless, by March 1945, Communist controlled "coalition" governments had been installed in Bulgaria and Rumania (geostrategically, the two more important countries), although genuine coalition government was allowed to persist in Hungary until August 1947, albeit subjected to ever increasing pressure.

Beyond these three ex-enemies lay four ex-allies, of a kind: Greece, Albania, Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia. Stalin had already conceded Greece to the British, despite the fact that left wing forces could easily have seized power when the Germans withdrew in October 1944. Here again, Stalin's concern to preserve entente over-rode other political objectives,

and he discouraged Greek left wing forces from taking up arms to protect their interests (although they took little notice), and demanded that Yugoslavia bring guerilla warfare in Greece to an end, rather than support it.

In Albania, the communist-led National Liberation Movement (LNC), the most consistent and effective of the resistance groups, had taken over government when the Germans withdrew in October 1944, and had been provisionally recognized by the Allies in November 1945. In Yugoslavia, another communist-led government was firmly in the saddle by March 1945, with the formal approval of the Western Powers and wide popular support. Tito had emerged from the war as the undisputed leader of the political and military resistance to the Axis occupation, his Partisans had liberated all of western Serbia from the Germans while the Red Army marched on Belgrade, and the government-in-exile in London and its military representatives in Yugoslavia had been thoroughly discredited. Tito, however, still deferred to Moscow, and, in the dispute between Yugoslavia and the Western Powers over the disposition of Trieste he reluctantly came to accept Stalin's advice to compromise, even though the beneficiary was the ex-enemy Italy.

The Communist regimes in Yugoslavia and Albania were apparently pro-Soviet, seeing Moscow as both mentor and liberator. The Czechoslovakians, likewise, saw the Red Army as liberators (there had been no effective indigenous resistance movement), and were friendly disposed towards the Soviet Union, choosing it as the only practical protector, Britain and France having demonstrated their impotence in this capacity. By March 1945 a genuine coalition government had been formed in Czechoslovakia, and although the Communist Party could have seized power at this stage, Stalin

actively discouraged them. He did, however, require the ceding of Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia (a virulently nationalist Ukrainian enclave) to Russia. In December 1945, the Red Army evacuated Czechoslovakia in prompt response to a suggestion by President Truman (American forces withdrew at the same time), and in May 1946 free elections gave the Communist Party thirty-eight percent of the poll, more than twice the votes earned by the next most popular party and far more broadly based.

By the end of 1945, then, the geopolitical situation in Eastern Europe was reasonably favorable for the Soviet Union, although there were growing indications that the relatively sympathetic appreciation of Soviet security concerns shown by Roosevelt was not shared by his successor. If anything, the Americans appeared to be at least trying to undermine this security, using the pretext of self-determination, if they were not actually trying to revive the old cordon sanitaire around Russia.

The Western Powers' solicitude for the sanctity of pre-war borders rang hollow to someone like Stalin, who had been born among the shifting frontiers of Trans-Caucasia and who, twenty-five years earlier, had watched the same Western Powers attempt to dismember Turkey to their own advantage, at the same time as they were re-arranging the Austro-Hungarian empire and prising away bits of Germany. Nor was the West's emphasis on the democratic process particularly persuasive to the Soviet Union, given that Czechoslovakia and Finland were the only newly independent East European states formed in the wake of the First World War that had managed to preserve the semblance of democratic government.

All the others had become more or less fascist. Their leaders had varying degrees of dictatorial powers and most of them were prepared to

ride on Hitler's coattails, since these states had substantial territorial claims on their neighbors. Mass fascist parties had existed in Hungary and Rumania. Poland, where democracy was effectively at an end by 1930, had been aligned with Germany and supported its policies for the best part of five years. During that time it had been bitterly anti-Russian and anti-communist; it joined in the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938 and seized part of Lithuania in early 1939.

Most of these states had substantial ethnic minorities who were severely oppressed, and in the main the lower social strata found themselves worse off than before independence. Political power in the inter-war years had lain with traditional groups such as landowners, businessmen, bureaucrats, intellectuals and the military, with workers and peasants having little or no effective representation. There was no reason to suppose that this pattern would not be repeated after World War II, unless positive steps were taken to prevent it. From Stalin's point of view, the issue was not democracy but whose "democrats": those who represented the interests of the traditional ruling classes, or those who represented the interests of the proletariat?

This viewpoint reflected a blend of Realpolitik and ideology, reinforced by wartime experience, with Greece and Yugoslavia providing polar examples. In both cases their London-based governments-in-exile had continued to be dominated by the pre-war right wing elements. In Yugoslavia, however, an indigenous communist-led resistance movement had come to represent the people instead, leading to a regime that was pro-Soviet; a similar process took place in Albania. In Greece, the communist-led resistance movement had also been by far the strongest political and

military force and had the widest backing. But British intervention resulted in the return of a harshly right-wing government that was strongly anti-Soviet and determined to suppress the communists.

Since Russia needed strong and friendly countries on her borders, this implied communist-controlled governments, and nowhere more so than in Poland. American interference in Soviet policy towards that country therefore smacked of ulterior motives. So, too, did U.S. complaints about spheres of interest, given Truman's reaffirmation of the Monroe Doctrine covering the American continents and the doctrine's apparent extension to cover the Pacific. The Soviets pointed to the similarities between what was happening in Greece and Poland. They also drew analogies between the two ex-enemy states: Italy, from whose control they were effectively excluded; and Rumania, which came under their own control. Japan, where General MacArthur had full authority, was something else again.

But the Western urge to intrude in such matters did not affect directly the security interests of the Soviet Union, and was mainly troublesome because it imposed delays on the process of establishing the desired political control over the buffer states to the west. While the increasing tendency for the other Powers to gang up on Russia over its policy in Eastern Europe and for Britain and America to walk back on commitments agreed by the Big Three did not augur well for continuing cooperation, the disagreements were not so fundamental as to require a change in threat assessments. Meanwhile, the Soviet Union's western frontiers were buffered by communist and/or friendly governments, with the maritime flanks covered by Finland and Bulgaria.

Restraining a German Resurgence

Germany was a problem of a different order. In the simplest terms this could be seen as a race to restore the shattered Soviet economy and rebuild its armed forces, before a resurgent Reich could do likewise. There were two elements to such a competition: one, to rebuild the Soviet military capability, and two, to delay the rebuilding of a German one. American aid could help with the first; German reparations had a role to play with both.

Stalin, a cynic as well as a political realist, would not have counted on capitalist charity to rebuild a communist Russia and, should it have been forthcoming, would have assumed its purpose was to achieve leverage over Soviet policy. Stalin recognized that the United States was under no obligation to continue Lend Lease once fighting was at an end and while he did comment that the manner in which it was stopped was "unfortunate, even brutal," Stalin acknowledged it was legitimate and would have seen this as a standard power play and nothing to be perturbed about. And while the attractions of substantial reconstruction loans were obvious, these had to be weighed against the probability that such loans (to be spent buying American industrial equipment and other producer goods) would save the United States from an otherwise inevitable post-war slump and another step towards the ultimate downfall of capitalism. In January 1945, the Soviets did finally suggest to the United States that they would be prepared to accept a reconstruction loan of \$6 billion at 2-1/4 percent. But they did not press the matter, nor was there progress on the American side. By September it had become clear that the U.S. Congress intended to use any such loans as a means of shaping Soviet policy.

As a consequence, German reparations were an essential component of Soviet defense policy, as well as being critical to the Soviet domestic

economy. Persistent American and British efforts to whittle down the scale of what the Russians saw as their rightful dues, and to hamper their collection, were therefore a matter for mounting concern.

Soviet requirements for German reparations were consistent and quite specific: (1) Germany would pay reparations in kind to the value of \$20 billion, half of which to go to the Soviet Union; and (2) There would be Four-Power control of the Ruhr industrial complex, the engine-room of the German war machine. At Tehran the United States had deferred decisions on both issues. Since the Soviets had no means of forcing the Western Powers to deliver up reparations from their occupation zones, they agreed reluctantly at Potsdam that each of the four Powers would be allowed to take what they could from its own zone. The decision favored the Western Powers, since their zones comprised about seventy percent of post-war Germany and Austria and contained about sixty percent of Germany's pre-war industrial base.

To mitigate the unfairness of this decision it had been agreed that Russia would receive a 10-15 percent share of what was not required to sustain the domestic economy in the Western zones. However, the decision as to what constituted a surplus, and the control of shipments east, lay effectively in Western hands.

With reparations, as with Lend Lease Stalin did not expect America to subsidize Russia's recovery, but he did assume that the German economy would be squeezed to yield the maximum returns. The Soviets had never accepted the so-called "first charge" principle that commercial exports had priority over reparations, besides which there was the prior question of what constituted "economic necessities." The Soviet definition, shaped by

the fact that the standard of living in Germany at the time of its surrender was higher than that prevailing in Russia's war-shattered economy, was very different to the American one. Furthermore, there had been a distinct shift in U.S. occupation policy in the period following Germany's surrender, from one of repression, to one of rehabilitation, and (in Russian eyes), from a concern for the Soviet ally's legitimate interests, to a solicitude for the German enemy's welfare. There was, indeed, a basic conflict of objectives. The Soviet Union was concerned to severely disable Germany (as was France), contributing to its own reconstruction in the process, while the United States was now primarily concerned with preventing Europe and Germany becoming a charge on the American taxpayer.

The problem was further complicated by the inherent contradiction between the separate Potsdam decisions that Germany should be treated as a single economic unit, and that each of the occupying powers could take what it wanted in reparations from its own zone. Nevertheless, Soviet-American relations on the Control Commission were relatively good for the first year, with French obstructionism being seen as the major problem by the English-speaking partners. Disagreements at the working level about running the German economy and extracting reparations came within the bounds of tough bargaining between conflicting interests. But in the spring of 1946 it began to appear that American objectives had moved beyond sparing their taxpayers, to integrating a rehabilitated Western Germany into the capitalist economic system.

At the beginning of May 1946, the U.S. Military Governor suspended all reparation shipments from the American zone, giving as his reason the

should be dismembered, stressing the need to occupy strong points inside these territorial components, so as to prevent surreptitious rearmament. It was, however, the British policy of keeping the country intact that prevailed. This meant that stripping Germany of its capital plant became the only means of rendering it harmless. But the bulk of the country's industrial capacity now lay outside Soviet control, and the American and British had become intent on rehabilitating this capacity rather than dismantling it.

Furthermore, by the summer of 1946, it was becoming clear that Soviet reparations policy had failed, even in the Soviet zone. The policy had been bedevilled by high-level disagreement about the merits of stripping Germany, the actual plans had been poorly formulated and badly executed, and had then become bogged down in bureaucratic wrangles over the competing claims for current production. This led to more intransigent demands for a Soviet share of reparations from the western zones, which were counterproductive, and harsher measures to extract reparations from the eastern zone, which estranged the German population even further.

Rather than pursuing some machiavellian scheme to assume political control of Germany, Soviet policy was floundering. While the Soviets had no difficulty in seeing what was to their disadvantage, it was much harder to formulate a coherent policy towards Germany that would serve their long term interests. Wartime experience would have convinced Stalin that the bonds (and drives) of patriotism were stronger than the mutual restraints of a shared ideology, and that a restored Germany, whatever its political complexion, would inevitably pose a threat to Russia. On the other hand, there were obvious disadvantages to a divided Germany, where the much

failure to reach Four Power agreement on treating Germany as a single economic unit, an explanation the Soviets found hard to take at face value. In July, the American and British occupation authorities began the process of integrating their occupation zones (which would be formally merged at the beginning of 1947), thus consolidating under one authority almost 60 percent of German and Austrian territory and the great bulk of their industrial capacity. At the same period the United States began to develop an export control system for trade with the Soviet Union; it officially quashed the possibility of any reconstruction loan; and to further complicate Russia's economic problems, it withdrew its support from the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. UNRRA's biggest recipients were the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans (including Byelorussia and the Ukraine), and its primary contributor had been America.

And then in early September, the U.S. Secretary of State made a major policy speech to a large audience of German and American officials, at the Opera House in Stuttgart. In this he gave strong backing to the concept of German self-government and economic revival, hinted that he did not regard the cession of German territory to Poland as permanent, and, while claiming that he did not want Germany to become a pawn or prize in a struggle between East and West, went on to pledge that "as long as there is an occupation army in Germany, American armed forces will be part of that occupation army."

These developments were all the more disturbing because the Soviet Union had yet to develop any policy towards Germany beyond the immediate objective of disarming its enemy and using the proceeds to help rebuild Russia. At Tehran, Stalin had endorsed Roosevelt's proposal that Germany

larger and far more prosperous part adhered to the West. This dilemma bedeviled Soviet policy for the best part of a decade, condemning them to a mainly reactive German policy, which was as ineffective as it was provocative.

Given this vulnerable situation, the Soviet leaders could not accept at face value American assertions that the policy initiatives in the U.S. zone were defensive responses to illegitimate Russian behavior. To the Soviets, the justice of their claims on German resources were self-evident and the need to neutralize this dangerous enemy was not only obvious, but had been specifically recognized in the Potsdam accords. It was the Soviets who had been consistent in their demands for reparations, while the Americans had swung from the extreme of Morgenthau's pastoralization plan to the opposite policy of rehabilitation. It was the USA that had insisted (to Russia's disadvantage) on breaching the principle of treating Germany as a single economic unit, but was now using the sanctity of that principle as a reason for halting the delivery of reparations from its own zone, and for promising increased German control of a unified British-American zone. Washington had meanwhile introduced the new suggestion that the German threat could best be contained through a twenty-five year Four Power Treaty guaranteeing German demilitarization. This proposal ran counter to the general expectation that Congress would require the withdrawal of American troops within two years, and failed to address the question of disarming Germany through dismantling its industrial capacity.

All these shifts in policy worked in the same direction: to Russia's disadvantage and in Germany's interests. Any rapprochement between a former ally and an erstwhile enemy would be disturbing. In this case, it

was particularly worrying because of the inherent appeal of the German argument that in their war with Russia they had been fighting civilization's battle, and that Germany was the natural ally of Britain and America against the Asiatic barbarians and/or Bolshevik hordes.

In terms of Soviet threat perceptions, an alarming feature of these new developments in Germany was that they were only one aspect of an abrupt shift in U.S. policy towards the Soviet Union which took place in early 1946. On Byrnes' return from a reasonably successful meeting of the three Foreign Ministers in Moscow in December 1945, the Secretary of State had made a nationwide broadcast in which he was optimistic and stressed the value of continued collaboration with the Soviet Union. Within two months he was attacking Russia in a major foreign policy speech in London, and the White House was clearly not unsympathetic to this confrontational stance. The thrust of the new policy was fleshed out by the leak of George Kennan's "Long Telegram" in February, and publication of a two-part article on the Soviet threat by John Foster Dulles in June.

Soviet political analysts had been talking for some time of two competing "tendencies" in Britain and America. One tendency or faction was prepared to continue with the decision-making system based on tripartite compromise and agreement that developed during the war. The other faction sought world domination for the Anglo-Saxon powers. One would therefore have expected that this sudden change in the thrust and style of U.S. policy towards Russia would have generated a major Soviet reevaluation of the threat. But it seems that Stalin was reluctant to forego the potential benefits of cooperation and, despite the mounting evidence, he chose not to accept that final victory had gone to the anti-Soviet tendency. He

persisted in the hope that vestiges of the wartime collaboration could be made to endure and was conciliatory when vital interests were not at stake. The sharp change in the U.S. style of negotiation appears to have been discounted as diplomatic bargaining tactics, or domestic political rhetoric that was prompted by the mid-term elections. Even the "all out" speech which launched the Truman Doctrine in March 1947 was treated at the time as anti-Communist propaganda, rather than as a declaration of cold war, possibly because it was timed to coincide with the preliminary stages of the Foreign Ministers' meeting in March-April in Moscow.

It is unlikely, however, that this sanguineness could have survived the actual meeting, whose main purpose was to consider draft peace treaties for Germany and Austria. The satellite treaties had been approved at the previous Council meeting in December, when the Soviets had made concessions, and it appeared in March as if the grounds for another successful compromise existed. The Soviets seemed prepared to adjust their position on the political and economic structure of Germany, in return for the payment to Russia of reparations from current German production in the western zones. But the United States would not agree to such reparations, and before it would even consider studying the factors involved, America required the Soviets first to comply with an unrealistic set of demands. Stonewalling on this issue by the British and Americans led to an impasse and it became clear that they were no longer interested in compromise.

The Shift in Soviet Threat Perceptions

Before continuing with the description of events as they are likely to have been seen from Moscow in 1947, the reader is reminded once more that

this study is not concerned to determine the causes of the Cold War, nor to apportion blame in the matter. The objective is to identify the genesis of Soviet threat perceptions. The study seeks to explain why Stalin shifted focus from the danger of a resurgent Germany in 15-20 years time to the more immediate threat of war within 5-6 years against a capitalist coalition led by the Anglo-Saxon powers. The emphasis continues to be on the Soviet viewpoint and no attempt is made to offer alternative explanations of the evidence that underlay their reassessment.

If there were still doubts in Stalin's mind about the thrust of Western policy after the Foreign Ministers' meeting in Moscow, these would have been finally dispelled by the proposed European Recovery Program. The full implications of this program became clear when Bevan, Bidault and Molotov met in Paris at the end of June to decide how best to proceed on the American offer. Although the use of U.S. economic strength was not unexpected, it seems that the Soviets assumed initially that Marshall's proposals were primarily prompted by the need to find markets for American output. It soon became clear, however, that something more threatening was involved. It appeared that Britain and France, under the guise of coordinating European reconstruction, were acting as U.S. agents in an ambitious scheme to lure as many countries as possible into a binding relationship with the West, by integrating their economies into the capitalist bloc.

Molotov sought to counter this thrust with proposals for a different approach to organizing the administration of aid. When the Western Ministers refused to entertain his ideas, Stalin decided that the best way to limit the damage was to refuse to participate in the recovery plan, and

to prevent others from doing so where possible. Besides the Soviet Union, seven countries declined outright to attend the first organizing conference, and Czechoslovakia later withdrew her initial acceptance under Soviet pressure.

The lines of battle had finally been drawn and this precipitated a major shift in Soviet foreign policy. Just as there had been "tendencies" in the West concerning how best to handle the Russians, so were there different opinions in Moscow on the costs and benefits of seeking cooperation with the United States, and the extent to which increasingly hostile American statements reflected rhetoric or substance. The Anglo-French stance at the Paris meeting, following as it did on the heels of the Truman declaration, the stonewalling on reparations at the Council of Foreign Ministers, and the eviction of the Communist members of the French and Italian coalition governments, appears to have finally convinced Stalin that the West was indeed on the offensive against Communism. Not only was cooperation no longer a practical option, but even the possibility of "peaceful coexistence" was in doubt. The hard-line pessimists therefore moved into favor in Moscow.

As if on cue, George Kennan's "X" article was published in Foreign Affairs³ and, given his position in the State Department and his role in prompting the policy shift at the beginning of March 1946, it seemed designed to spell out U.S. intentions to the attentive public. It mentioned Soviet weaknesses and suggested that the Communist system already held the seeds of its own decay, and concluded by talking of the need to confront Russian encroachments with "unalterable counter-force." It also

3 "The Sources of Soviet Conduct," July 1947.

argued that American policy was "by no means limited to holding the line" but that U.S. action could "influence....internal developments within Russia" and "increase enormously the strains under which Soviet policy must operate." This fitted only too well the pattern of U.S. behavior over the previous 18 months, particularly since Truman's "all out" speech in March.⁴

The Soviet response was to tighten their grip on the Communist parties of Europe and consolidate their hold on the countries of eastern Europe, while trying to counter the rise of American influence in western Europe and to disrupt the progress of the European Recovery Program. The undecided "two tendencies" assessment of Western policy was replaced by the categorical "two camps" formulation and the new line was spelt out by Zhdanov and Malenkov at the organizing conference of the so-called Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in September 1947. The next nine months saw the outbreak of violent communist-led strikes in France and Italy, and a heightening of Stalinist terror in eastern Europe as governments were fully communized and ideological deviations suppressed. At the same time, the states of eastern Europe were bound tighter to the Soviet Union and to each other through a series of bilateral treaties.

4 Harry S. Truman, Truman Public Papers: 1947, pp. 178-79.

Reassessing the Situation: 1947-48

Initially, the Soviets perceived the Marshall Plan as designed to consolidate and extend U.S. economic control over Europe, while undermining the Russian sphere of influence. By the early months of 1948 they came to believe that the long-term military implications were more ominous and that the real aim of the Marshall Plan was to arm Western Europe to the point where American client states would be capable of taking on the Soviet ones. Russia would then be faced with the choice of allowing the frontiers of socialism to be pushed back, or of intervening and risking an American nuclear attack.

The difference between this pessimistic assessment in 1948 and the sanguine prognosis in 1944-45 represented a massive failure of Soviet foreign policy, both in terms of shaping the international environment and in forecasting the behavior of other states. The United States had not withdrawn into isolationism. America, Canada and Australia, the "arsenals of capitalism," had not slumped back into the predicted recession, nor had the need for markets proved to be a constraint on U.S. foreign policy. And, despite conflicting interests, America and Britain were working well together as an effective and aggressive team. As for shaping the international environment, the situation was now the opposite to what the Soviets had hoped for, wartime cooperation having been replaced by bellicose confrontation.

The opportunity cost of giving a vanishing entente priority over geopolitical gains had not been insignificant. Northern Iran, rich in agriculture and oil, could easily have been drawn into the Soviet orbit. In Greece, direct Soviet involvement in the fall of 1944 would have given

EAM control of the government (and the Soviets access to the Mediterranean) and even in 1946, support for the communist guerillas could well have ensured their success. Meanwhile, the restraints Stalin placed on Tito, in the latter's negotiations over Trieste and support of Greek communists, had helped sour relations with Yugoslavia.

But these were only opportunities lost on the periphery, and the real disaster lay in the total failure of Soviet policy towards Germany. Reparations had contributed much less to the rebuilding of Russia than had been hoped, and had come mainly from the Soviet zone. The objective of crippling Germany's war-making potential had not been achieved, since the concept of reparations had been replaced by that of rehabilitation in the British and American zones. And even worse, these zones were now being forcefully shaped into an independent German state which, combined with the French zone, would encompass the great bulk of the country's industrial capacity.

In terms of the Soviet Union's security interests, this failure of foreign policy was second only to Stalin's disastrous misjudgment in June 1941, and may explain why he was so tardy in accepting the implications of the steady deterioration in relations with the United States. In retrospect, Moscow could see that the fundamental shift in United States policy that occurred in early 1946 signalled the victory of the "imperialistic" tendency within the policy-making elites of Britain and America. The Soviets had to identify the reasons for this adverse development and assess its security implications.

The Soviets are unlikely to have placed much weight on the notion that it was their own behavior which evoked this unfavorable Western reaction.

In their eyes, it was the Anglo-Saxon partners who had shown bad faith over the wartime agreements, and they considered their own policies to have been generally conciliatory, except where vital interests were at stake. The Marxist prognosis of history provided a better explanation of Anglo-American behavior. The first requirement was, therefore, to decide whether the capitalists were already preparing to attempt the destruction of the socialist homeland or were more interested in pursuing imperialist goals.

A Review of the Evidence

When going back over the evidence, the speech by Winston Churchill at Fulton, Missouri in March 1946, was a key indicator. It gave proof that the wily British imperialists, traditional enemies of Tsarist Russia and the mortal foes of communism, had managed to bend the United States to a cause they could no longer pursue on their own. Churchill warned that the pervasive peril of communism posed a growing challenge to Christian civilization, which could only be met by the "fraternal association of English-speaking peoples." This would include a permanent military alliance between the United States and the British Commonwealth, based upon the possession of an atomic monopoly.

This was nothing less than a call for continued world domination by the Anglo-Saxon powers, who had ended the war astride the world, with an overwhelming preponderance of military power everywhere, except on the ground directly facing Soviet forces. Many in the United States were ready to heed this call for benevolent hegemony, there having been a noticeable growth in the military's influence on policy and a change in America's traditionally critical view of imperialism. Dean Acheson, the Under

Secretary of State whose influence grew steadily under Marshall, made no bones about his belief in the past virtues of the Pax Britannica and the need to reconstruct some comparable hegemonic system. And there was a body of opinion in America that saw the atomic monopoly as a manifestation of the divine mandate, and thought it should be used accordingly.

But Churchill's speech was equally a call for a crusade against Russia. In that light, Western opposition to the "people's democracies" in eastern Europe could be seen as a cover for reinstalling the traditional anti-Russian parties, and eventually squeezing the Soviet Union out of Europe, as had been done to Russia after the Napoleonic wars and again at the Congress of Berlin in 1878. Did this mean, then, that the United States was now girding itself for capitalism's inevitable assault on the socialist camp?

The evidence was mixed. Certainly, the Americans were clearly set on thwarting Soviet interests wherever possible, cases in point being their reactions to Russia's search for oil concessions in northern Iran and for a share in the defense of the Turkish Straits. They had managed to stack the peace conferences against Russia and had also been remarkably successful in forging the United Nations Organization into an instrument of capitalist policy. Right from its inception at the charter-drafting conference in San Francisco in the spring of 1945, the Anglo-Saxons had exploited their world influence to shape the UN membership and dominate the proceedings, which they had then used to embarrass the Soviet Union.

This, of course, was what Stalin had feared, the League of Nations having served as an anti-Bolshevik consortium during its first decade. But the Americans were particularly confrontational and it could be argued that

they were seeking casi belli, or at least preparing to win a war they saw as inevitable. In support of the latter assessment, there had been a significant amount of loose talk in America about the inevitability of conflict with Russia and the advantages of initiating preventive war, and of course the "Soviet threat" had figured prominently in the public argument between the U.S. navy and the army air force, which had been under way since the Fall of 1945. Meanwhile, Western assertions about Russia's military capabilities and its urge to war were so wide of reality as to make the Soviets suspect that they were part of a deliberate policy designed to build up American domestic support for aggressive imperialist policies.

But the evidence remained inconclusive. Although Truman had demonstrated an increasing readiness to use military force in support of U.S. foreign policy and had been seeking to establish air bases around the world, the run down in the size of the American armed forces had continued through 1947, and the downward trend in budgetary appropriations had yet to be checked. It was therefore implausible that the United States was itself planning to initiate a massive land attack on the Soviet Union in the near future. But what of the slightly longer term?

One of the more disturbing features of the post-war period was the speed with which American policy towards its erstwhile enemies had moved from hostility to one of friendship. Within two months of the war's end in Europe, the U.S. was pressing for Italian membership of the United Nations, while still resisting that of Poland, the first country to have offered armed resistance to Hitler. In the Western-occupied zones of Germany, the recent enemy was now being wooed with promises of self-government. And

even in Japan, the enemy towards whom the Americans had felt most bitter, the occupation regime had moved to restore the economy and rehabilitate the people, while introducing Western-style government and institutions.

But Italy, Germany and Japan weren't just ex-opponents. They were the three founding members of the Anti-Comintern Pact, the three nations whose expansionist ambitions in the 1930s had led inexorably to the carnage of the Second World War, and two of them were long standing enemies of Russia. What did the doctrine of "containment" really imply? Could it be America's intention to rebuild these countries and then use their armies to push back the Soviets to their 1921 frontiers, or even further?

Certainly, one might infer such a plan from developments in Europe. Here, Churchill's evil genius could again be seen at work, seeking to weld the western European states into an anti-communist bloc, the core of which would be a radically new partnership between France and Germany, the recognized proponents of large ground forces. This posed a double threat to Russia. It turned France from a traditional ally into a latent enemy, while rehabilitating Germany and placing it at the center of a hostile and potentially powerful coalition. It also freed Britain for a global role, in partnership with the United States. Such a division of labor was supported by the evidence that America was intent on building up its atomic bomber force.

The establishment of a separate U.S. Air Force in September 1947 was a clear indication of the growing importance that America attached to atomic air power. This was reflected in the widespread support for the concept in Congress and the country at large, and there were few inhibitions about identifying the Soviet Union as the potential target. In January 1948 a

Presidential Commission had called for a military establishment based on air power, built around a 70-group air force, and the report of the Congressional Aviation Policy Board, published in March, included a substantial expansion of naval aviation as well. Congress responded by appropriating additional funds to start the process of building up from 55 to 70 air groups in five years, and to start building a 65,000 ton aircraft carrier capable of launching atomic strikes on Russia. Meanwhile the Atomic Energy Commission was reported to be making "majestic and terrible progress in building the country's nuclear arsenal," and the British were known to be developing their own capability.

At the same time, America had been doing its utmost to preserve its atomic monopoly. In October 1945 Truman had made it quite clear that the U.S. would not share the secrets of the atom bomb and expressed confidence that the monopoly would endure. One approach to hampering Soviet progress had been to corner the world market in raw materials. The U.S. had also done its best to deny the Soviets the benefit of German research and raw materials, including bombing at least one atomic laboratory in the eastern zone.

The other approach involved a political initiative through the United Nations, which came to be known as the Baruch Plan. This was inherently one-sided. As Secretary of Commerce Henry Wallace pointed out to President Truman, the plan had the effect of requiring Russia to suspend its research and reveal information about its atomic energy programs and data on its raw materials, while America could continue building up its atomic arsenal. Baruch went out of his way to stress that swift and sure punishment, unconstrained by any veto, lay at the very heart of the proposed security

system in which (it so happened) the USSR was clearly the implied violator and the U.S. would be the only country capable of administering such punishment.

It is unlikely that Stalin ever believed that the United States was serious about relinquishing its atomic monopoly. But Baruch's initial address, which combined strong rhetoric with masterly imprecision, evoked considerable public support, and the Soviets could not refuse to negotiate. But nor could they accept controls that would require them to stop developing their own weapons, unless the U.S. first gave up its monopoly. The United States, meanwhile was not prepared to give up its weapons until fool-proof controls were in place. Negotiations therefore went nowhere and the Americans achieved a major propaganda victory.

The Evidence of Western Intentions

The central question facing national security planners in Moscow during the 1947-50 period was the nature of America's long-term intentions. Active Anglo-American hostility was now a basic assumption, but it still had to be determined what form this might take, and the extent to which the Russian homeland was directly threatened.

Zhdanov's "two camps" doctrine meant that the Soviets had to base their analysis of U.S. intentions on the assumption that Western policy was now firmly in the hands of those who sought the downfall of the communist regime in Russia, and world domination for the Anglo-Saxon powers. Past evidence that reflected the accommodating tendency in Western policy had therefore to be discarded, and this process would have caused a certain pattern to emerge.

Not surprisingly, this had similarities with the pattern underlying Western revisionist literature that seeks to pin blame for the Cold War on U.S. behavior and policies. Indeed, one would be surprised if it were otherwise, since both analyses assume hostile Western intentions. But the validity of the revisionist thesis on the causes of the Cold War has no bearing on the present analysis of how the Soviets are likely to have reassessed the threat in 1947-48.

The salient features of the historical data included: Britain's pre-war attempt to direct Hitler eastwards; the two year delay in launching a meaningful second front, while the Soviets were provided with the means to fight and bleed on their own; and the suspicious circumstances surrounding German peacefeelerers to the western Allies and the Rhine crossing at Remagen. There was also the secret development of the atom bomb and the demonstration that the U.S. was prepared to use such weapons.

The pattern was reinforced in the wake of victory. The Anglo-Saxon powers attempted to prevent the Soviets from acquiring their own bomb, first by denying them access to the necessary raw materials and then through international controls. Wartime understanding notwithstanding, America and Britain did their best to prevent the establishment of a Soviet-oriented buffer zone on Russia's western borders, and were successful in preventing Soviet involvement in the defense of the Turkish Straits. The reparations process, intended to disarm Germany and restore Russia, soon came to a halt in the American and British zones, with current production going to the domestic economy or to pay for imports. By 1948, the emphasis was on restoring the German and Japanese economies, rather than on restraining their resurgence.

Acquiring Intelligence on Russia

This walking back on wartime agreements threw a different light on the evidence that several categories of potential war criminals were being shielded from arrest by American and British authorities. By July 1946, Reinhard Gehlen, formerly in charge of the eastern military intelligence division of the German armed forces, had been installed near Frankfurt as a "private contractor" to the U.S. Army, providing it with current and background intelligence on Russia and eastern Europe. He was able to reassemble many of his former staff and, besides milking displaced persons and returning prisoners of war, he sought to reactivate his old networks. The latter included Ukrainian and Byelorussian nationalists who had remained behind when the Germans retreated. But the great majority of such collaborators, particularly those used by the Nazis to administer occupied Russian territory, had withdrawn with the Germans, and were now holed up in Western refugee camps.

Many of these collaborators qualified as war criminals, either as fully-fledged Nazis or as perpetrators of serious crimes in their own right, but they were shielded from the legal process by British and U.S. intelligence. So, too were senior German generals who were put to work by the Americans, recording and analysing their experience fighting the Russians. This reluctance to hand over war criminals and collaborators could be read as evidence that the Anglo-Saxons were laying the groundwork for future operations against the Soviet Union. The latter interpretation was supported by information that during 1946-47, the U.S. Army had been assembling experts on Eastern Europe (particularly Ukrainians) as potential leaders of partisan forces.

Forging a Western Alliance

The evidence of hostile intentions and of an emerging physical threat to the Soviet Union continued to accumulate during the remainder of the 1940s. By the end of 1947, the Anglo-Saxon powers had ceased to pretend any interest in reaching an all-German solution, and concentrated overtly on establishing a German state comprising the three western zones, and binding it in to the European Recovery Program, an objective they had achieved by May 1949. These developments were paralleled by the militarization of the movement for European unity, its fusion with the European Recovery Program (ERP) and its extension to include the United States and Canada, which served to confirm Soviet suspicions of the underlying purpose of the Marshall Plan. The Brussels Treaty of March 1948 brought the Benelux countries together with Britain and France in "Economic, Social and Cultural Collaboration and Self Defense" and it provided the forum for deciding on how best to bring West Germany into the ERP. The five Ministers of Defense met as the Western Union Defense Committee, and by October had appointed Commanders-in-Chief for land, air and naval commands, with Montgomery as the Permanent Military Chairman.

But it had already been suggested that Western European Union could serve as the basis for a larger defense organization, and in December 1948, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland and Portugal were invited to join America, Canada and the Brussels Treaty Powers in a North Atlantic regional defense agreement. The resultant treaty was published in March 1949 and, despite Soviet protests, was signed in April and all participants had ratified it by August. The implications of these developments were even more serious. Senator Vandenberg's "Senate Resolution," which paved the

way for the U.S. to join NATO, legitimized a fundamental shift in America's traditional foreign policy. It sanctioned active involvement in "entangling alliances" and, combined with the Atlantic Pact, would promote a flow of armaments from America to all parts of the Soviet periphery. Even more ominous, (as Le Monde commented at the time) the rearmament of Germany was "present in the Atlantic Pact as the seed is in the egg."

Building a Partisan Capability

Meanwhile, there was more specific evidence indicating offensive intentions towards the Russian homeland. In 1949, the Anglo-Saxons began interrogating systematically the thousands of prisoners of war being returned from the Soviet Union, and it could be inferred from the pattern of questions that the objective was to piece together the best picture possible of the physical and administrative structure of the Soviet Union, including details of military installations and industrial plants. By the end of 1948, evidence was also accumulating that the United States was seeking to develop the capability to support or provoke political unrest inside Russia and eastern Europe, clandestine operations having started in the summer of 1947.

The potential of such a covert instrument of policy had been demonstrated during the run-up to the Italian election in April 1948, when a skillful disinformation program aimed at the Italian communist party had reinforced the U.S. campaign of persuasion, inducement and veiled threat, that was credited with ensuring a Communist defeat at the polls. Since then, a new U.S. intelligence organization had entered the field, and was actively recruiting young refugees from communist-controlled countries,

including Ukrainians and Byelorussians. While this might only denote a precautionary Western move, covering the possibility of Soviet aggression, the pattern of activity increasingly suggested a sustained attempt to destabilize communist controlled governments and to foment rebellion among dissident nationalities within the Soviet Union.

The evidence of such attempts grew steadily, ranging from the clandestine invasion of Albania in 1949 by a sizeable force of anti-Hoxha guerillas and aid to the underground in Poland, to the provision of supplies and radio operators in the Carpathian mountains of south west Russia and the steady flow of Western-trained agents being dropped by air or landed by sea, together with military supplies and money. The interrogation of captured agents would have left little doubt that the agents, at least, thought the U.S. was serious in its attempt to undermine Soviet control.

There was also the evidence that a number of political leaders of the puppet regimes established by the Nazis in eastern Europe and occupied Russia were moved to the United States between 1948 and 1950. Since this broke U.S. law as well as allied agreements on how to handle collaborators and war criminals, the Soviets could only assume that the U.S. had future plans for such people. The thrust of such plans was suggested by the "National Committees for Liberation" that were established for each eastern European ethnic group, with officials recruited from among such immigrants.

Developing an Atomic Strike Capability

A separate body of evidence, implying a direct threat to Russia within a few years, was provided by Western defense expenditures and military

capabilities. The Mutual Defense Assistance Program enabled the rearming of potential U.S. allies with surplus weapons and equipment left over from the war. Meanwhile, the precipitate fall in U.S. defense budgets had been checked, and Fiscal Year 1948 saw an 8.5 percent real increase in appropriations. About half the budget was spent on aviation, as America embarked on the process of enlarging and modernizing its already powerful strategic bomber force.

The purpose of such a force had been authoritatively spelt out by the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force, in a magazine article published the very week he retired.⁵ He noted that destroying "a few hundred square miles of industrial area in a score of Russian cities would fatally cripple Russia industrial power." And went on to aver that, in such circumstances "it would be a miracle of organization for [Russia's] far away armies to be held intact and effective in the midst of hostile populations, with their communications torn and subject to unremitting attack." Although the discussion was pitched in terms of responding to a Soviet attack, the logic of the analysis was equally valid for a war initiated by America.

General Spaatz foresaw the future introduction of intercontinental supersonic bombers and guided missiles carrying atomic warheads but, pending their development he stressed the need for forward bases from which to mount the air offensive against Russia's industrial heartlands. And America was busily meeting that need. By early 1948, the U.S. had acquired base rights in Greenland, Iceland, Morocco, Libya, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, as well as the bases they already had in Britain and Japan, and there was

5 Carl Spaatz "If we should have to fight again," Life Magazine, July 5 and August 1948.

every indication that the process was continuing. Meanwhile, America had demonstrated its ability to project strategic air power when it deployed 120 Super Fortresses to Europe in July and August 1948, in response to the blockade of Berlin, and there was political support for the use of that power should the occasion arise. And as if to highlight the capability, early in 1949, a B-50A bomber had made a non-stop flight around the world, relying on inflight refuelling such as would be required (to cite Aviation Week) to reach targets deep inside Russia.

Preparing Domestic Opinion

All this evidence had to be evaluated within the context of increasing U.S. unwillingness to negotiate except on its own terms, its readiness to push disagreement to crisis rupture (as with the Berlin currency dispute that led to the blockade), and to act as if it saw war as inevitable. And this, in turn, had to be set against a background of escalating domestic rhetoric which, if not actually orchestrated by the U.S. Administration, was certainly led by those in government circles, with their emphasis on military and material power. The depiction of communist Russia as being relentlessly bent on territorial aggrandizement both justified gearing-up the U.S. military-industrial base for war and made the concept of a preventive war "to preserve world peace" increasingly acceptable to a public opinion that was already becoming inured to the idea of nuclear conflict.

The case was well articulated in a 1949 book by a respected military writer,⁶ who specifically advocated an atomic attack on Russia to prevent

6 George F. Eliot, If Russia Strikes (Bobbs Merrill, 1949). Eliot, a

the Soviets from developing their own capability. But the book was also about the implacability of the communist threat, the organic pressures driving the Soviet leaders to war, and the effectiveness of U.S. strategic airpower and atomic weapons. The facts that these extreme notions received generally favorable reviews, that the book was well informed about numbers and weapon capabilities, and that it echoed many of the arguments made by General Spaatz in 1948, made it appear more authoritative than perhaps it actually was. But in any case, the phenomenon it represented was too widespread for the Soviets to ignore the book's message.

The Soviet Estimate of Threat: 1948-53

On the basis of the accumulating evidence, Moscow would have been justified in inferring that U.S. objectives in respect to the Soviet Union were as follows:

- o Deny the Soviet Union an atomic delivery capability
- o Contain the influence of Soviet communism within the borders of Russia
- o Effect a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet state.

There remained the question of what lengths the U.S. was prepared to go in pursuit of these objectives. The sustained and largely successful efforts to persuade the American electorate that Soviet communism was the source of all evil and a threat to the survival of the United States and Western civilization, argued for worst-case assumptions. This meant that Russia was faced by three kinds of threat to the homeland.

retired army officer, was a wartime military writer for the New York Herald Tribune.

The most immediate was the possibility of an unprovoked U.S. attack on Russian atomic research and development facilities. This threat had emerged in the wake of the American failure to thwart Soviet atomic development either by monopolizing the supply of raw material or through the Baruch Plan. As long as some semblance of East-West cooperation had persisted, the threat could be assumed to be very low. The theoretical probability of such an attack increased as US-Soviet relations became more confrontational, but in practical terms the well-publicized American belief that the Soviets could not develop a weapon before 1953 lessened the immediacy of this threat. However, this self-imposed restraint on U.S. behavior was removed in September 1949, when America detected that the Soviets had successfully tested an atomic weapon in August. Thereafter, there was a very real "window of vulnerability" and the Soviets had to live with the threat of a preventive air strike until such time as they could acquire the capability to deter such an attack with the counter-threat of a strike against North America.

The second threat stemmed from the American objective of containing communist influence within Russia's borders. This implied the overthrow of Soviet-oriented governments in eastern Europe, and their replacement with Westward-leaning regimes. Given the history of these East European countries, in most cases the new regimes would be rabidly anti-Soviet, turning a defensive buffer zone into a springboard for subversion and invasion. This threat was not immediate, since the capitalist West had yet to build up the ground forces needed to achieve such an objective, but the likely scenario was not hard to visualize. Some pretext, opportunistic or contrived, would be found to justify an imperialist intervention in Eastern

Europe in the name of "freedom," and this would be carried out by the armies of the Western European continental powers. The Anglo-Saxon partners would stand back from the fray, and only become involved if the Soviet Union went to the aid of the other socialist states.

The third kind of threat stemmed from the American objective of bringing about a fundamental change in the nature of the Soviet state. This implied the demise of the Communist Party apparatus, and that could only come about as the result of war between the two social systems. While it seemed unlikely that America would deliberately initiate such a war, it could not be excluded that rising anti-Communist fervor and the fear of a growing Soviet military capability, combined with a particular world view, might lead to a popular demand in the United States for preventive war, especially if the brunt of the land battle were to be borne by others. But such a war could also be an outgrowth of a Western attempt to "roll back" Soviet influence in Europe, either via a natural process of escalation or through a U.S. decision to launch an attack on the Soviet Union, on the grounds that inevitably, Russia would be drawn into the conflict. Some kind of general war was also a likely outcome of an American preventive attack on the Soviet Union's nascent atomic delivery capability.

From the Soviet viewpoint, it could be assumed that a war between the two social systems would combine the undesirable features of the Crimean War, the Civil War and Allied intervention, and the recently concluded Great Patriotic War. It could also be assumed that at an early stage, the Russian homeland would be subjected to massive assaults by atomic and conventional bombers. The advantages to be gained by implementing such a U.S. attack before Soviet mobilization was properly underway were obvious.

Moscow would therefore have to plan on the assumption that any situation that might possibly lead to Soviet-U.S. conflict, particularly those involving Eastern Europe, there would be tremendous pressure in Washington to launch preventive air attacks on Russia.

It is now history that in 1948, responding to this reassessment of the threat to Russia, the Soviets halted the run-down of their wartime forces and started a major rearmament program. The two sides' threat perceptions thus mirrored each other and both saw the 1953-54 as critical years. The Korean War reinforced each side's perceptions, although for very different reasons.

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After 1953 the images began to diverge, Western threat perceptions remained set in the same mold, encased in the doctrine of nuclear deterrence that was predicated on a Soviet urge to military aggression. Meanwhile, Soviet threat perceptions evolved.⁷ Following Stalin's death in March 1953, the likelihood of a large-scale capitalist invasion was discounted and the primary danger was seen as massive nuclear strikes on Russia. In 1956, the Soviets formally acknowledged that war between the two social systems was no longer fatalistically inevitable. And by the end of the 1960s the principal danger was no longer seen to lie in a premeditated Western attack, but in an inadvertent war, precipitated in some way by the imperialists. Such a war would inevitably be nuclear. It

7 Michael McGwire, Military Objectives in Soviet Foreign Policy (The Brookings Institution, 1987).

would be short and violent, a fight to the finish between the two social systems, where survival would equate with victory. Soviet strategy was predicated on preemptive nuclear strikes on North America.

However, in late 1966 it was ruled that it was no longer inevitable that a world war would be nuclear and, even if it were, strikes on Russia might be deterred. This meant that North America must be spared nuclear attack and world war would no longer be a fight to the finish. Soviet strategy was to defeat NATO and evict U.S. forces from Europe, avoiding the resort to nuclear weapons if possible, and then prevent the return of U.S. forces to the continent. This second phase of a world war would be long drawn out and its course hard to predict. The new doctrine favoured arms control and the reduction of nuclear arsenals, ideally to zero. But it also required the buildup of conventional forces to enable a blitzkrieg offensive to reduce the probability that NATO would resort to nuclear weapons in seeking to avoid defeat.

The necessary restructuring of Soviet ground and air forces was largely complete by the late 1970s, but in the early 1980s it appears to have been concluded that major conflict with the United States was more likely to erupt in the region north of the Persian Gulf than in Europe. Nor was it inevitable that such a conflict would escalate to world war. In such circumstances the Soviets would not launch an offensive against NATO (which would precipitate world war) but would "hold" in the west, while fighting in the south.

This is a major development. For the first time in seventy years, the requirement (in the event of war) to be able to launch a continental scale offensive westward is no longer the factor that dominates Soviet military

strategy. It was this new factor which enabled Gorbachev's proposals for conventional arms control in 1986, and the full implications have yet to be perceived.

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