TWO

Cold War Empires: Europe

The Prime Minister then said that it was important that the nations who would govern the world after the war, and who would be entrusted with the direction of the world after the war, should be satisfied and have no territorial or other ambitions. . . . He said that hungry nations and ambitious nations are dangerous, and he would like to see the leading nations of the world in the position of rich, happy men.

Tehran Conference minutes, 30 November 1943[1]

[A] map with new borders of the USSR . . . was brought after the war to Stalin's dacha. The map was very small—like those for school textbooks. Stalin pinned it to the wall: "Let's see what we have here. . . . Everything is all right to the north. Finland has offended us, so we moved the border from Leningrad. Baltic states—that's age-old Russian land!—and they're ours again. All Belorussians live together now, Ukrainians together, Moldavians together. It's okay to the west." And he turned suddenly to the eastern borders. "What do we have there? . . . . The Kuril Islands belong to us now, Sakhalin is completely ours—you see, good! And Port Arthur's ours, and Dairen is ours"—Stalin moved his pipe across China—"and the Chinese Eastern railway is ours. China, Mongolia—everything is in order. But I don't like our border right here!" Stalin said and pointed to the Caucasus.

Felix Chuev[2]

BY 1947, it was clear that cooperation to build a new order among the nations that had vanquished the old one was not going to be possible. There followed the most remarkable *polarization* of politics in modern history. It was as if a gigantic magnet had somehow come into existence, compelling most states, often even movements and individuals within states, to align themselves along fields of force thrown out from either Washington or Moscow. Remaining uncommitted, in a postwar international system that seemed so compulsively to require commitment, would be no easy matter. The United States and the Soviet Union were now as close as any great powers have ever been to controlling—as Tocqueville had foreseen Americans and Russians someday would—"the destinies of half the world."

Theorists of international relations have insisted that in seeking to understand such a system we need pay little attention to the "units" that make it up. Because states exist within an anarchic environment, survival has to be their common objective; power is the means by which all of them—regardless of their internal makeup—seek to ensure it. Nations therefore behave like featureless billiard balls: their collisions are significant, but their character is not.[3] Tocqueville's distinction between authoritarian and democratic traditions in the Russian-American relationship, from this perspective, would be quite irrelevant.

The historian must point out, though, that however "great" the United States and the Soviet Union were during the Cold War, the "power" they obtained and wielded was rarely comparable. If these were billiard balls, they were not of the same size or weight or mass. Nor did the spheres of influence Washington and Moscow dominated resemble one another, whether from a military, economic, ideological, or moral perspective—a fact that has become obvious now that one of them no longer exists. Apples and oranges might be the better metaphor: at least it would allow for asymmetry, irregularity, and the possibility of internal rot.

But even this model has its deficiencies, because it leaves little room for the role of third parties—to say nothing of fourth, fifth, and ^{n}th parties—in shaping the Soviet-American relationship. It makes a big difference if great powers have to extend their authority against, rather than in concert with, the wishes of those subjected to it. The choice is between resistance and collaboration, and it falls to those incorporated within spheres of influence, not to those who impose them, ultimately to make it. If we are to grasp the nature of the post-World War II international system, then we will need an analytical framework capable of accounting for the rise and fall of great powers; but also one that incorporates variations in the nature of power and the influence it produces, as well as the limitations on power that permit peripheries to make a difference, even when things are being run from very powerful centers.

Such a framework exists, I think, in a more ancient method of governance than either democracy or authoritarianism: it is *empire*. I mean, by this term, a situation in which a single state shapes the behavior of others, whether directly or indirectly, partially or completely, by means that can range from the outright use of force through intimidation, dependency, inducements, and even inspiration.[4] Leaders of both the United States and the Soviet Union would have bristled at having the appellation "imperial" affixed to what they were doing after 1945. But one need not send out ships, seize territories, and hoist flags to construct an empire: "informal" empires are considerably older than, and continued to exist alongside, the more "formal" ones Europeans imposed on so much of the rest of the world from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries.[5] During the Cold War years Washington and Moscow took on much of the character, if never quite the charm, of old imperial capitals like London, Paris, and Vienna. And surely American and Soviet influence, throughout most of the second half of the twentieth century, was at least as ubiquitous as that of any earlier empire the world had ever seen.

Ubiquity never ensured unchallenged authority, though, and that fact provides yet another reason for applying an imperial analogy to Cold War history. For contrary to popular impressions, empires have always involved a two-way flow of influence. Imperializers have never simply acted upon the imperialized; the imperialized have also had a surprising amount of influence over the imperializers.[6] The Cold War was no exception to this pattern, and an awareness of it too will help us to see how that rivalry emerged, evolved, and eventually ended in the way that it did.

I

Let us begin with the structure of the Soviet empire, for the simple reason that it was, much more than the American, deliberately designed. It has long been clear that, in addition to having had an authoritarian vision, Stalin also had an imperial one, which he proceeded to implement in at least as single-minded a way. No comparably influential builder of empire came close to wielding power for so long, or with such striking results, on the Western side.

It was, of course, a matter of some awkwardness that Stalin came out of a revolutionary movement that had vowed to smash, not just tsarist imperialism, but all forms of imperialism throughout the world. The Soviet leader constructed his own logic, though, and throughout his career he devoted a surprising amount of attention to showing how a revolution and an empire might coexist. Bolsheviks could never be imperialists, Stalin acknowledged in one of his earliest public pronouncements on this subject, made in April 1917. But surely in a *revolutionary* Russia nine-tenths of the non-Russian nationalities would not *want* their independence.[7] Few among those minorities found Stalin's reasoning persuasive after the Bolsheviks did seize power later that year, however, and one of the first problems Lenin's new government faced was a disintegration of the old Russian empire not unlike what happened to the Soviet Union after communist authority finally collapsed in 1991.

Whether because of Lenin's own opposition to imperialism or, just as plausibly, because of Soviet Russia's weakness at the time, Finns, Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, Poles, and Moldavians were allowed to depart. Others who tried to do so—Ukrainians, Belorussians, Caucasians, Central Asians—were not so fortunate, and in 1922 Stalin proposed incorporating these remaining (and reacquired) nationalities into the Russian republic, only to have Lenin as one of his last acts override this recommendation and establish the multi-ethnic Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.[8] After Lenin died and Stalin took his place it quickly became clear, though, that whatever its founding principles the USSR was to be no federation of equals. Rather, it would function as an updated form of empire even more tightly centralized than that of the Russian tsars.

Lenin and Stalin differed most significantly, not over authoritarianism or even terror, but on the legitimacy of Great Russian nationalism. The founder

of Bolshevism had warned with characteristic pungency of "that truly Russian man, the Great-Russian chauvinist," and of the dangers of sinking into a "sea of chauvinistic Great-Russian filth, like flies in milk." Such temptations, he insisted, might ruin the prospects of revolution spreading elsewhere in the world.[9] But Stalin—the implied target of Lenin's invective—was himself a Great Russian nationalist, with all the intensity transplanted nationals can sometimes attain.[10] "The leaders of the revolutionary workers of all countries are avidly studying the most instructive history of the working class of Russia, its past, the past of Russia," he would write in a revealing private letter in 1930, shortly after consolidating his position as Lenin's successor. "All this instills (cannot but instill!) in the hearts of the Russian workers a feeling of revolutionary national pride, capable of moving mountains and working miracles."[11]

The "Stalin constitution" of 1936, which formally specified the right of non-Russian nationalities to secede from the Soviet Union, coincided with the great purges and an officially sanctioned upsurge in Russian nationalism that would persist as a prominent feature of Stalin's regime until his death.[12] It was as if the great authoritarian had set out to validate his own flawed prediction of 1917 by creating a set of circumstances in which non-Russian nationalities would not even *think* of seceding, even though the hypothetical authority to do so remained. The pattern resembled that of the purge trials themselves: one maintained a framework of legality—even, within the non-Russian republics, a toleration of local languages and cultures considerably greater than under the tsars. But Stalin then went to extraordinary lengths to deter anyone from exercising these rights or promoting those cultures in such a way as to challenge his own rule. He appears to have concluded, from his own study of the Russian past, that it was not "reactionary" to seek territorial expansion. His principal ideological innovation may well have been to impose the ambitions of the old princes of Muscovy, especially their determination to "gather in" and dominate all of the lands that surrounded them, upon the anti-imperial spirit of proletarian internationalism that had emanated from, if not actually inspired, the Bolshevik Revolution.[13]

Stalin's fusion of Marxist internationalism with tsarist imperialism could only reinforce his tendency, in place well before World War II, to equate the advance of world revolution with the expanding influence of the Soviet state.[14] He applied that linkage quite impartially: a major benefit of the 1939 pact with Hitler had been that it regained territories lost as a result of the Bolshevik Revolution and the World War I settlement. But Stalin's conflation of imperialism with ideology also explains the importance he attached, following the German attack in 1941, to having his new Anglo-American allies confirm these arrangements. He had similar goals in East Asia when he insisted on bringing the Soviet Union back to the position Russia had occupied in Manchuria prior to the Russo-Japanese War: this he finally achieved at the 1945 Yalta Conference in return for promising to enter the war against Japan.[15] "My task as minister of foreign affairs was to expand the borders of our Fatherland,"

Molotov recalled proudly many years later. "And it seems that Stalin and I coped with this task quite well."[16]

II

From the West's standpoint, the critical question was how far Moscow's influence would extend *beyond* whatever Soviet frontiers turned out to be at the end of the war. Stalin had suggested to Milovan Djilas that the Soviet Union would impose its own social system as far as its armies could reach,[17] but he was also very cautious. Keenly aware of the military power the United States and its allies had accumulated, Stalin was determined to do nothing that might involve the USSR in another devastating war until it had recovered sufficiently to be certain of winning it. "I do not wish to begin the Third World War over the Trieste question," he explained to disappointed Yugoslavs, whom he ordered to evacuate that territory in June 1945.[18] Five years later, he would justify his decision not to intervene in the Korean War on the grounds that "the Second World War ended not long ago, and we are not ready for the Third World War."[19] Just how far the expansion of Soviet influence would proceed depended, therefore, upon a careful balancing of opportunities against risks. "[W]e were on the offensive," Molotov acknowledged:

> They [presumably the West] certainly hardened their line against us, but we had to consolidate our conquests. We made our own socialist Germany out of our part of Germany, and restored order in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, where the situations were fluid. To squeeze out capitalist order. This was the cold war.

But, "of course," Molotov added, "you had to know when to stop. I believe in this respect Stalin kept well within the limits."[20]

Who or what was it, though, that set the limits? Did Stalin have a fixed list of countries he thought it necessary to dominate? Was he prepared to stop in the face of resistance within those countries to "squeezing out the capitalist order"? Or would expansion cease only when confronted with opposition from the remaining capitalist states, so that further advances risked war at a time when the Soviet Union was ill-prepared for it?

Stalin had been very precise about where he wanted Soviet boundaries changed; he was much less so on how far Moscow's sphere of influence was to extend. He insisted on having "friendly" countries around the periphery of the USSR, but he failed to specify how many would have to meet this standard. He called during the war for dismembering Germany, but by the end of it was denying that he had ever done so: that country would be temporarily divided, he told leading German communists in June 1945, and they themselves would eventually bring about its reunification.[21] He never gave up on the idea of an eventual world revolution, but he expected this to result—as his comments to

the Germans suggested—from an expansion of influence emanating from the Soviet Union itself. "[F]or the Kremlin," a well-placed spymaster recalled, "the mission of communism was primarily to consolidate the might of the Soviet state. Only military strength and domination of the countries on our borders could ensure us a superpower role.[22]

But Stalin provided no indication—surely because he himself did not know—of how rapidly, or under what circumstances, this process would take place. He was certainly prepared to stop in the face of resistance from the West: at no point was he willing to challenge the Americans or even the British where they made their interests clear. Churchill acknowledged his scrupulous adherence to the famous 1944 "percentages" agreement confirming British authority in Greece, and Yugoslav sources have revealed Stalin's warnings that the United States and Great Britain would never allow their lines of communication in the Mediterranean to be broken.[23] He quickly backed down when confronted with Anglo-American objections to his ambitions in Iran in the spring of 1946, as he did later that year after demanding Soviet bases in the Turkish Straits.[24] This pattern of advance followed by retreat had shown up in the purges of the 1930s, which Stalin halted when the external threat from Germany became too great to ignore, and it would reappear with the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War, both situations in which the Soviet Union would show great caution after provoking an unexpectedly strong American response.

What all of this suggests, though, is not that Stalin had limited ambitions, only that he had no timetable for achieving them. Molotov retrospectively confirmed this: "Our ideology stands for offensive operations when possible, and if not, we wait."[25] Given this combination of appetite with aversion to risk, one cannot help but wonder what would have happened had the West tried containment earlier. To the extent that it bears partial responsibility for the coming of the Cold War, the historian Vojtech Mastny has argued, that responsibility lies in its failure to do just that.[26]

Where Western resistance was unlikely, as in Eastern Europe, Stalin would in time attempt to replicate the regime he had already established inside the Soviet Union. Authority extended out from Moscow by way of government and party structures whose officials had been selected for their obedience, then down within each of these countries through the management of the economy, social and political institutions, intellectuals, even family relationships. The differentiation of public and private spheres that exists in most societies disappeared as all aspects of life were fused with, and then subordinated to, the interests of the Soviet Union as Stalin himself had determined them.[27] Those who could not or would not go along encountered the same sequence of intimidation, terror, and ultimately even purges, show trials, and executions that his real and imagined domestic opponents had gone through during the 1930s. "Stalin's understanding of friendship with other countries was that the Soviet Union would lead and they would follow," Khrushchev recalled. "[He] waged the struggle against the enemies of the people there in the same way that he did in the Soviet Union. He had one demand: absolute subordination."[28]

Stalin's policy, then, was one of imperial expansion and consolidation differing from that of earlier empires only in the determination with which he pursued it, in the instruments of coercion with which he maintained it, and in the ostensibly anti-imperial justifications he put forward in support of it. It is a testimony to his skill, if not to his morality, that he was able to achieve so many of his imperial ambitions at a time when the tides of history were running against the idea of imperial domination—as colonial offices in London, Paris, Lisbon, and The Hague were finding out—and when his own country was recovering from one of the most brutal invasions in recorded history. The fact that Stalin was able to *expand* his empire when others were contracting and while the Soviet Union was as weak as it was requires explanation.[29] Why did opposition to this process, within and outside Europe, take so long to develop?

One reason was that the colossal sacrifices the Soviet Union had made during the war against the Axis had, in effect, "purified" its reputation: the USSR and its leader had "earned" the right to throw their weight around, or so it seemed.[30] Western governments found it difficult to switch quickly from viewing the Soviet Union as a glorious wartime ally to portraying it as a new and dangerous adversary. President Harry S. Truman and his future Secretary of State Dean Acheson—neither of them sympathetic in the slightest to communism—nonetheless tended to give the Soviet Union the benefit of the doubt well into the early postwar era.[31] A similar pattern developed within the United States occupation zone in Germany, where General Lucius D. Clay worked out a cooperative relationship with his Soviet counterparts and resisted demands to "get tough" with the Russians, even after they had become commonplace in Washington.[32]

Resistance to Stalin's imperialism also developed slowly because Marxism-Leninism at the time had such widespread appeal. It is difficult now to recapture the admiration revolutionaries outside the Soviet Union felt for that country before they came to know it well. "[Communism] was the most rational and most intoxicating, all-embracing ideology for me and for those in my disunited and desperate land who so desired to skip over centuries of slavery and backwardness and to bypass reality itself," Djilas recalled, in a comment that could have been echoed throughout much of what came to be called the "third world."[33] Because the Bolsheviks themselves had overcome one empire and had made a career of condemning others, it would take decades for people who were struggling to overthrow British, French, Dutch, or Portuguese colonialism to see that there could also be such a thing as Soviet imperialism. European communists—notably the Yugoslavs—saw this much earlier, but even to most of them it had not been apparent at the end of the war.

Still another explanation for the initial lack of resistance to Soviet expansionism was the fact that its repressive character did not become immediately apparent to all who were subjected to it. With regimes on the left taking power in Eastern and Central Europe, groups long denied advancement could now expect it. For many who remembered the 1930s, autarchy within a Soviet bloc could seem preferable to exposure once again to international capitalism, with

its periodic cycles of boom and bust.[34] Nor did Moscow impose harsh controls everywhere at the same time.[35] Simple administrative incompetence may partially account for this: one Russian historian has pointed out that "[d]isorganization, mismanagement and rivalry among many branches of the gigantic Stalinist state in Eastern Europe were enormous."[36] But it is also possible, at least in some areas, that Stalin did not expect to *need* tight controls; that he anticipated no serious challenge and perhaps even spontaneous support. Why did he promise free elections after the war? Maybe he thought the communists would win them.

One has the impression that Stalin and the Eastern Europeans got to know one another only gradually. The Kremlin leader was slow to recognize that Soviet authority would not be welcomed everywhere beyond Soviet borders; but as he did come to see this he became all the more determined to impose it everywhere. The Eastern Europeans were slow to recognize how confining incorporation within a Soviet sphere was going to be; but as they did come to see this they became all the more determined to resist it, even if only by withholding, in a passive but sullen manner, the consent any regime needs to establish itself by means other than coercion. Stalin's efforts to consolidate his empire therefore made it at once more repressive and less secure.[37] Meanwhile, an alternative vision of postwar Europe was emerging from the other great empire that established itself in the wake of World War II, that of the United States, and this too gave Stalin grounds for concern.

III

The first point worth noting, when comparing the American empire to its Soviet counterpart, is a striking reversal in the sequence of events. Stalin's determination to create his empire preceded by some years the conditions that made it possible: he had first to consolidate power at home and then defeat Nazi Germany, while at the same time seeing to it that his allies in that enterprise did not thwart his long-term objectives. With the United States, it was the other way around: the conditions for establishing an empire were in place long before there was any clear intention on the part of its leaders to do so.[38] Even then, they required the support of a skeptical electorate, something that could never quite be taken for granted.

The United States had been poised for global hegemony at the end of World War I. Its military forces played a decisive role in bringing that conflict to an end. Its economic predominance was such that it could control both the manner and the rate of European recovery. Its ideology commanded enormous respect, as Woodrow Wilson found when he arrived on the Continent late in 1918 to a series of rapturous public receptions. The Versailles Treaty fell well short of Wilson's principles, to be sure, but the League of Nations followed closely his own design, providing an explicit legal basis for an international

order that was to have drawn, as much as anything else, upon the example of the American constitution itself. If there was ever a point at which the world seemed receptive to an expansion of United States influence, this was it.

Americans themselves, however, were not receptive. The Senate's rejection of membership in the League reflected the public's distinct lack of enthusiasm for international peace-keeping responsibilities. Despite the interests certain business, labor, and agricultural groups had in seeking overseas markets and investment opportunities, most Americans saw few benefits to be derived from integrating their economy with that of the rest of the world. Efforts to rehabilitate Europe during the 1920s, therefore, could only take the form of private initiatives, quietly coordinated with the government. Protective tariffs hung on well into the 1930s—having actually increased with the onset of the Great Depression—and exports as a percentage of gross national product remained low in comparison to other nations, averaging only 4.2 per cent between 1921 and 1940.[39] Investments abroad had doubled between 1914 and 1919 while foreign investment in the United States had been cut in half;[40] but this shift was hardly sufficient to overcome old instincts within the majority of the public who held no investments at all that it was better to stand apart from, rather than to attempt to dominate, international politics outside of the Western hemisphere.[41]

This isolationist consensus broke down only as Americans began to realize that a potentially hostile power was once again threatening Europe: even their own hemisphere, it appeared, might not escape the consequences this time around.[42] After September 1939, the Roosevelt administration moved as quickly as public and Congressional opinion would allow to aid Great Britain and France by means short of war; it also chose to challenge the Japanese over their occupation of China and later French Indochina, thereby setting in motion a sequence of events that would lead to the attack on Pearl Harbor.[43] Historians ever since have puzzled over this: why, after two decades of relative inactivity on the world scene, did the United States suddenly become hyperactive? Might the administration have realized that it would never generate public support for the empire American elites had long desired without a clear and present danger to national security, and did it not then proceed to generate one?[44] Can one not understand the origins and evolution of the Cold War in similar terms?[45]

There are several problems with such interpretations, one of which is that they confuse contingency with conspiracy. Even if Roosevelt had hoped to maneuver the Japanese into "firing the first shot," he could not have known that Hitler would seize this opportunity to declare war and thereby make possible American military intervention in Europe. The Pacific, where the United States would have deployed most of its strength in the absence of Hitler's declaration, would hardly have been the platform from which to mount a bid for global hegemony. These explanations also allow little room for the autonomy of others: they assume that Hitler and the Japanese militarists acted *only* in response to what the United States did, and that other possible motives for their behavior—personal, bureaucratic, cultural, ideological, geopolitical—were

insignificant. Finally, these arguments fail to meet the test of proximate versus distant causation. The historian Marc Bloch once pointed out that one could, in principle, account for a climber's fall from a precipice by invoking physics and geology: had it not been for the law of gravity and the existence of the mountain, the accident surely could not have occurred. But would it follow that all who ascend mountains must plummet from them?[46] Just because Roosevelt *wanted* the United States to enter the war and to become a world power afterwards does not mean that his actions alone made these things happen.

A better explanation for the collapse of isolationism is a simpler one: it had to do with a resurgence of authoritarianism. Americans had begun to suspect, late in the nineteenth century, that the internal behavior of states determined their external behavior;[47] certainly it is easy to see how the actions of Germany, Italy, and Japan during the 1930s could have caused this view to surface once again, much as it had in relations with tsarist Russia and imperial Germany during World War I. Once that happened, the Americans, not given to making subtle distinctions, began to oppose authoritarianism everywhere, and that could account for their sudden willingness to take on several authoritarians at once in 1941. But that interpretation, too, is not entirely adequate. It fails to explain how the United States could have coexisted as comfortably as it did with authoritarianism in the past—especially in Latin America—and as it would continue to do for some time to come. It certainly does not account for the American willingness during the war to embrace, as an ally, the greatest authoritarian of this century, Stalin himself.

The best explanation for the decline of isolationism and the rise of the American empire, I suspect, has to do with a distinction Americans tended to make—perhaps they were more subtle than one might think—between what we might call benign and malignant authoritarianism. Regimes like those of Somoza in Nicaragua or Trujillo in the Dominican Republic might be unsavory, but they fell into the benign category because they posed no serious threat to United States interests and in some cases even promoted them. Regimes like those of Nazi Germany and imperial Japan, because of their military capabilities, were quite another matter. Stalin's authoritarianism had appeared malignant when linked to that of Hitler, as it was between 1939 and 1941; but when directed against Hitler, it could come to appear quite benign. What it would look like once Germany had been defeated remained to be seen.

With all this, the possibility that even malignant authoritarianism might harm the United States remained hypothetical until 7 December 1941, when it suddenly became very real. Americans are only now, after more than half a century, getting over the shock: they became so accustomed to a Pearl Harbor mentality—to the idea that there really are deadly enemies out there—that they find it a strange new world, instead of an old familiar one, now that there are not. Pearl Harbor was, then, the defining event for the American empire, because it was only at this point that the most plausible potential justification for the United States becoming and remaining a global power as far as the American people were concerned—an endangered national security—became an actual

one.[48] Isolationism had thrived right up to this moment; but once it became apparent that isolationism could leave the nation open to military attack, it suffered a blow from which it never recovered. The critical date was not 1945, or 1947, but 1941.

It did not automatically follow, though, that the Soviet Union would inherit the title of "first enemy" once Germany and Japan had been defeated. A sense of vulnerability preceded the identification of a source of threat in the thinking of American strategists: innovations in military technology—long-range bombers, the prospect of even longer-range missiles—created visions of future Pearl Harbors before it had become clear from where such an attack might come. Neither in the military nor the political-economic planning that went on in Washington during the war was there consistent concern with the USSR as a potential future adversary. The threat, rather, appeared to arise from war itself, whoever might cause it, and the most likely candidates were thought to be resurgent enemies from World War II.[49]

The preferred solution was to maintain preponderant power for the United States, which meant a substantial peacetime military establishment and a string of bases around the world from which to resist aggression if it should ever occur. But equally important, a revived international community would seek to remove the fundamental causes of war through the United Nations, a less ambitious version of Wilson's League, and through new economic institutions like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, whose task it would be to prevent another global depression and thereby ensure prosperity. The Americans and the British assumed that the Soviet Union would want to participate in these multilateral efforts to achieve military and economic security. The Cold War developed when it became clear that Stalin either could not or would not accept this framework.[50]

Did the Americans attempt to impose their vision of the postwar world upon the USSR? No doubt it looked that way from Moscow: both the Roosevelt and Truman administrations stressed political self-determination and economic integration with sufficient persistence to arouse Stalin's suspicions—easily aroused, in any event—as to their ultimate intentions. But what the Soviet leader saw as a challenge to his hegemony the Americans meant as an effort to salvage multilateralism. At no point prior to 1947 did the United States and its Western European allies abandon the hope that the Russians might eventually come around; and indeed negotiations aimed at bringing them around would continue at the foreign ministers' level, without much hope of success, through the end of that year. The American attitude was less that of expecting to impose a system than one of puzzlement as to why its merits were not universally self-evident. It differed significantly, therefore, from Stalin's point of view, which allowed for the possibility that socialists in other countries might come to see the advantages of Marxism-Leninism as practiced in the Soviet Union, but never capitalists.[51] They were there, in the end, to be overthrown, not convinced.

IV

The emergence of an opposing great power bloc posed serious difficulties for the principle of multilateralism, based as it had been on the expectation of cooperation with Moscow. But with a good deal of ingenuity the Americans managed to *merge* their original vision of a single international order built around common security with a second and more hastily improvised concept that sought to counter the expanding power and influence of the Soviet Union. That concept was, of course, containment, and its chief instrument was the Marshall Plan.

The idea of containment proceeded from the proposition that if there was not to be one world, then there must not be another world war either. It would be necessary to keep the peace while preserving the balance of power: the gap that had developed during the 1930s between the perceived requirements of peace and power was not to happen again. If geopolitical stability could be restored in Europe, time would work against the Soviet Union and in favor of the Western democracies. Authoritarianism need not be the "wave of the future"; sooner or later even Kremlin authoritarians would realize this fact and change their policies. "[T]he Soviet leaders are prepared to recognize *situations*, if not arguments," George F. Kennan wrote in 1948. "If, therefore, situations can be created in which it is clearly not to the advantage of their power to emphasize the elements of conflict in their relations with the outside world, then their actions, and even the tenor of their propaganda to their own people, *can* be modified."[52]

This idea of time being on the side of the West came—at least as far as Kennan was concerned—from studying the history of empires. Edward Gibbon had written in *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that "there is nothing more contrary to nature than the attempt to hold in obedience distant provinces," and few things Kennan ever read made a greater or more lasting impression on him. He had concluded during the early days of World War II that Hitler's empire could not last, and in the months after the war, he applied similar logic to the empire Stalin was setting out to construct in Eastern Europe.[53] The territorial acquisitions and spheres of influence the Soviet Union had obtained would ultimately become a source of *insecurity* for it, both because of the resistance to Moscow's control that was sure to grow within those regions and because of the outrage the nature of that control was certain to provoke in the rest of the world. "Soviet power, like the capitalist world of its own conception, bears within it the seeds of its own decay," Kennan insisted in the most famous of all Cold War texts, his anonymously published 1947 article on "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." He added, "the sprouting of those seeds is well advanced."[54]

All of this would do the Europeans little good, though, if the new and immediate Soviet presence in their midst should so intimidate them that their own morale collapsed. The danger here came not from the prospect that the Red Army would invade and occupy the rest of the continent, as Hitler had tried to do; rather, its demoralized and exhausted inhabitants might simply vote in

communist parties who would then do Moscow's bidding. The initial steps in the strategy of containment—stopgap military and economic aid to Greece and Turkey, the more carefully designed and ambitious Marshall Plan—took place within this context: the idea was to produce instant intangible reassurance as well as eventual tangible reinforcement. Two things had to happen in order for intimidation to occur, Kennan liked to argue: the intimidator had to make the effort, but, equally important, the target of those efforts had to agree to be intimidated.[55] The initiatives of 1947 sought to generate sufficient self-confidence to prevent such acquiescence in intimidation from taking place.

Some historians have asserted that these fears of collapse were exaggerated: that economic recovery on the continent was already underway, and that the Europeans themselves were never as psychologically demoralized as the Americans made them out to be.[56] Others have added that the real crisis at the time was within an American economy that could hardly expect to function hegemonically if Europeans lacked the dollars to purchase its products.[57] Still others have suggested that the Marshall Plan was the means by which American officials sought to project overseas the mutually-beneficial relationship between business, labor, and government they had worked out at home: the point was not to make Wilsonian values a model for the rest of the world, but rather the politics of productivity that had grown out of American corporate capitalism.[58] All of these arguments have merit: at a minimum they have forced historians to place the Marshall Plan in a wider economic, social, and historical context; more broadly they suggest that the American empire had its own distinctive internal roots, and was not solely and simply a response to the Soviet external challenge.

At the same time, though, it is difficult to see how a strategy of containment could have developed—with the Marshall Plan as its centerpiece—had there been nothing to contain. One need only recall the early 1920s, when similar conditions of European demoralization, Anglo-French exhaustion, and American economic predominance had existed; yet no American empire arose as after World War II. The critical difference, of course, was national security: Pearl Harbor created an atmosphere of vulnerability Americans had not known since the earliest days of the republic, and the Soviet Union by 1947 had become the most plausible source of threat. The American empire arose *primarily*, therefore, not from internal causes, as had the Soviet empire, but from a perceived external danger powerful enough to overcome American isolationism.[59]

Washington's wartime vision of a postwar international order had been premised on the concepts of political self-determination and economic integration. It was intended to work by assuming a set of *common* interests that would cause other countries to *want* to be affiliated with it rather than to resist it. The Marshall Plan, to a considerable extent, met those criteria: although it operated on a regional rather than a global scale, it did seek to promote democracy through an economic recovery that would proceed along international and not nationalist lines. Its purpose was to create an American sphere of influence, to be sure, but one that would allow those within it considerable freedom. The

principles of democracy and open markets required nothing less, but there were two additional and more practical reasons for encouraging such autonomy. First, the United States itself lacked the capability to administer a large empire: the difficulties of running occupied Germany and Japan were proving daunting enough.[60] Second, the idea of autonomy was implicit in the task of restoring European self-confidence; for who, if not Europeans themselves, was to say when the self-confidence of Europeans had been restored?

Finally, it is worth noting that even though Kennan and the other early architects of containment made use of imperial analogies, they did not see themselves as creating an empire, but rather a restored balance of power. Painfully—perhaps excessively—aware of limited American resources, fearful that the domestic political consensus in favor of internationalism might not hold, they set out to reconstitute *independent* centers of power in Europe and Asia.[61] These would be integrated into the world capitalist system, and as a result they would certainly fall under the influence of its new hegemonic manager, the United States. But there was no intention here of creating satellites in anything like the sense that Stalin understood that term; rather, the idea was that "third forces" would resist Soviet expansionism while preserving as much as possible of the multilateralist agenda American officials had framed during World War II. What the United States really wanted, State Department official John D. Hickerson commented in 1948, was "not merely an extension of US influence but a real European organization strong enough to say 'no' both to the Soviet Union and to the United States, if our actions should seem so to require."[62]

The American empire, therefore, reflected little imperial consciousness or design. An anti-imperial tradition dating back to the American Revolution partially accounted for this: departures from that tradition, as in the Spanish–American War of 1898 and the Philippine insurrection that followed, had only reinforced its relevance—outside the Western hemisphere. So too did a constitutional structure that forced even imperially minded leaders like Wilson and the two Roosevelts to accommodate domestic attitudes that discouraged imperial behavior long after national capabilities had made it possible. And even as those internal constraints diminished dramatically in World War II—they never entirely dropped away—Americans still found it difficult to think of themselves as an imperial power. The idea of remaking the international system in such a way as to transcend empires altogether still lingered, but so too did doubts as to whether the United States was up to the task.[63] In the end it was again external circumstances—the manner in which Stalin managed his own empire and the way in which this pushed Europeans into preferring its American alternative—that brought the self-confidence necessary to administer imperial responsibilities into line with Washington's awareness of their existence.

V

The test of any empire comes in administering it, for even the most repressive tyranny requires a certain amount of acquiescence among its subjects. Coercion and terror cannot everywhere and indefinitely prop up authority: sooner or later the social, economic, and psychological costs of such measures begin to outweigh the benefits. Empires that can accommodate dissent, defuse it, and perhaps even reorient themselves to reflect certain aspects of it, are more likely to survive than those that simply try to suppress it.[64] Resilience is as important as rigidity in designing buildings, bridges, and baseball bats: the world of politics is not all that different.

It is apparent now, even if it was not always at the time, that the Soviet Union did not manage its empire particularly well. Because of his personality and the structure of government he built around it, Stalin was—shall we say—less than receptive to the wishes of those nations that fell within the Soviet sphere. He viewed departures from his instructions with deep suspicion, but he also objected to manifestations of independent behavior where instructions had not yet been given. As a result, he put his European followers in an impossible position: they could satisfy him only by seeking his approval for whatever he had decided they should do—even, at times, before he had decided that they should do it.

An example occurred late in 1944 when the Yugoslavs—then the most powerful but also the most loyal of Stalin's East European allies—complained politely to Soviet commanders that their troops had been raping local women in the northern corner of the country through which they were passing. Stalin himself took note of this matter, accusing the Yugoslavs—at one point tearfully—of showing insufficient respect for Soviet military sacrifices and for failing to sympathize when "a soldier who has crossed thousands of kilometers through blood and fire and death has fun with a woman or takes some trifle." The issue was not an insignificant one: the Red Army's behavior was a problem throughout the territories it occupied, and did much to alienate those who lived there. Stalin's only concern, though, seems to have been that the Yugoslavs were failing to meet the standards of deference and obedience he expected from allies; for their part, the Yugoslavs began to wonder, apparently for the first time, just whose interests international communism as directed from Moscow was supposed to serve.[65]

Similar questions arose regarding Yugoslav plans for a postwar Balkan federation. Stalin had initially supported this idea, perhaps as an excuse for removing American and British military representatives from former enemy states like Romania, but he soon developed reservations. The Yugoslavs themselves might become too powerful; and their propensity for hot-headedness—evident in their claims to Trieste and their shooting down of two American Air Force planes in 1946—might provoke the West. Orders went out that the Yugoslavs were to proceed slowly in their plans to take over Albania, and were to stop

assisting the Greek guerillas altogether.[66] Within the context of the Cold War, these actions reflected Stalin's caution about confronting the British and the Americans; to that extent, they defused tensions. But to the militant Yugoslavs, they suggested the arrogance of an imperial authority determined to subordinate their interests—which they had defined largely in ideological terms—to those of the Soviet state.

Stalin did little better managing Western European communists, despite the fact that they still regarded themselves as his loyal supporters. In May 1947, the French Communist Party voted no confidence in the government of Premier Paul Ramadier, only to have him expel their representatives from his cabinet. The Italians, with strong American encouragement, threw out their own communists later that month.[67] Andrei Zhdanov, who managed the Soviet Communist Party's relations with its foreign counterparts, sharply reprimanded the French comrades for acting without Moscow's authorization and therefore arousing concerns in the minds of "Soviet workers." He then passed on this communication to all other European communist parties.[68] The implication seemed to be that none of them should do anything without consulting Moscow first, a requirement that would obviously be difficult to meet for communists who had responsibilities within national governments and therefore some obligation to consider national interests.

The Americans' unexpected offer of Marshall Plan aid to the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in June 1947, caused even greater difficulties for Stalin's management of empire—which is precisely what Kennan hoped for when he recommended making it.[69] In one of the stranger illusions arising from their ideology, Soviet leaders had always anticipated United States economic assistance in some form. Lenin himself expected American capitalists, ever in search of foreign markets, to invest eagerly in the newly formed USSR, despite its official antipathy toward them.[70] Stalin hoped for a massive American reconstruction loan after World War II, and even authorized Molotov early in 1945 to offer acceptance of such assistance in order to help the United States stave off the economic crisis that Marxist analysis showed must be approaching.[71] When the Marshall Plan was announced Stalin's first reaction was that the capitalists must be desperate. He concluded, therefore, that the Soviet Union and its East European allies should indeed participate in the plan, and quickly dispatched Molotov and a large delegation of economic experts to Paris to take part in the conference that was to determine the nature and extent of European needs.[72]

But then Stalin began to reconsider. His ambassador in Washington, Nikolai Novikov, warned that the American offer to the Soviet Union could not be sincere: "A careful analysis of the Marshall Plan shows that ultimately it comes down to forming a West European bloc as a tool of US policy. All the good wishes accompanying the plan are demagogic official propaganda serving as a smokescreen."[73] Soviet intelligence picked up reports—accurate enough—that American Under-Secretary of State William Clayton had been conspiring with British officials on using the Marshall Plan to reintegrate Germany into the West European economy and to deny further reparations shipments to the

Soviet Union.[74] This information, together with indications at Paris that the Americans would require a coordinated European response, caused Stalin to change his mind and order his own representatives to walk out. "The Soviet delegation saw those claims as a bid to interfere in the internal affairs of European countries," Molotov explained lamely, "thus making the economies of these countries dependent on US interests."[75]

Curiously, though, Stalin did not at first demand that the East Europeans follow the Soviet example. Instead he instructed their delegations to attend follow-up sessions of the Paris conference, but to "show . . . that the Anglo-French plan is unacceptable, prevent its unanimous approval and then . . . withdraw from the meeting, taking with them as many delegates of other countries as possible."[76] These orders stood for only three days, however, because Stalin then considered again: what if the East Europeans—especially the Czechs, whose communists did not yet completely control the government—chose not to follow the script and proceeded to accept Marshall Plan aid? Accordingly, a new message went out stating awkwardly that the Soviet Communist Party Central Committee "proposes refusing to participate in the meeting, that is, sending no delegations to it. Each country may give the reasons for its refusal as it sees fit."[77]

Unfortunately, the Czechs and the Poles, following the earlier instructions, had already announced their intention to attend. The Poles quickly changed their mind but the Czechs procrastinated, more because of confusion than determined resistance.[78] Stalin responded by peremptorily summoning their leaders to Moscow. He had been persuaded "on the basis of material reasons," he told them, that the Americans were using the Marshall Plan to consolidate a Western coalition hostile to the Soviet Union:

> The Soviet government has therefore been surprised by your decision to accept this invitation. For us it is a matter of friendship. . . . If you go to Paris you shall demonstrate your will to cooperate in the action of isolating the Soviet Union. All the Slavonic states have refused, not even Albania feared to refuse, and therefore, we think you should reverse your decision.[79]

Stalin's intentions were now clear to all including himself: there would be no East European participation in the Marshall Plan, or in any other American scheme for the rehabilitation of Europe. "I went to Moscow as the Foreign Minister of an independent sovereign state," Czech Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk commented bitterly. "I returned as a lackey of the Soviet government."[80]

But the Kremlin boss too had shed some illusions. Marxist-Leninist analyses had long predicted, not just a postwar economic collapse in the West, but eventual conflict between the British and the Americans. In a September 1946 report from Washington which Molotov had carefully annotated, Ambassador Novikov had insisted that "the United States regards England as its greatest potential competitor." The Anglo-American relationship, "despite the temporary attainment of agreements on very important questions, [is] plagued with great internal contradictions and cannot be lasting."[81] By early 1947, Stalin was even offering the British a military alliance: as one report to Molotov put it, "Soviet diplomacy has in England practically unlimited possibilities."[82] What the Marshall Plan showed was how wrong these assessments were. Capitalists, it now appeared, could indeed reconcile their differences; they considered the Soviet Union a greater threat to all than each posed to the other; time was not on Moscow's side. Ideology again had led Stalin into romanticism and away from reality. Once he realized this—in Europe at least—he never quite recovered from the shock.

VI

The United States, in contrast, proved surprisingly adept at managing an empire. Having attained their authority through democratic processes, its leaders were experienced—as their counterparts in Moscow were not—in the arts of persuasion, negotiation and compromise. Applying domestic political insights to foreign policy could produce embarrassing results, as when President Truman likened Stalin to his old Kansas City political mentor, Tom Pendergast, or when Secretary of State James F. Byrnes compared the Russians to the US Senate: "You build a post office in their state, and they'll build a post office in our state."[83] But the habits of democracy had served the nation well during World War II: its strategists had assumed that their ideas would have to reflect the interests and capabilities of allies; it was also possible for allies to advance proposals of their own and have them taken seriously.[84] That same pattern of mutual accommodation persisted after the war, despite the fact that all sides acknowledged—as they had during most of the war itself—the disproportionate power the United States could ultimately bring to bear.

Americans so often deferred to the wishes of allies during the early Cold War that some historians have seen the Europeans—especially the British—as having managed *them*.[85] The new Labour government in London did encourage the Truman administration to toughen its policy toward the Soviet Union; Churchill—by then out of office—was only reinforcing these efforts with his March 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech. The British were ahead of the Americans in pressing for a consolidation of Western occupation zones in Germany, even if this jeopardized prospects for an overall settlement with the Russians. Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin determined the timing of the February 1947 crisis over Greece and Turkey when he ended British military and economic assistance to those countries, leaving the United States little choice but to involve itself in the eastern Mediterranean and providing the occasion for the Truman Doctrine.[86] And it was the desperate economic plight of the West Europeans generally that persuaded newly appointed Secretary of State George C. Marshall, in June 1947, to announce the comprehensive program of American assistance that came to bear his name.

But one can easily make too much of this argument. Truman and his advisers were not babes in the woods. They knew what they were doing at each stage, and did it only because they were convinced their actions would advance American interests. They never left initiatives entirely up to the Europeans: they insisted on an integrated plan for economic recovery and quite forcefully reined in prospective recipients when it appeared that their requests would exceed what Congress would approve. "[I]n the end we would not *ask* them," Kennan noted, "we would just *tell* them, what they would get."[87] The Americans were flexible enough, though, to accept and build upon ideas that came from allies; they also frequently let allies determine the timing of actions taken. As a consequence, the British, French, and other West Europeans came to feel that they had a stake in what Washington was doing, despite the fact that it amounted to their own incorporation within an American sphere of influence.[88]

One might argue, to be sure, that European elites agreed to all of this for their own self-interested reasons; that the European "masses" were never consulted. It is worth remembering, however, that free elections ultimately ratified alignment with the United States in every country where that took place. The newly-formed Central Intelligence Agency, not always confident of such outcomes, did take it upon itself at times to manipulate democratic processes, most conspicuously in the Italian elections of April 1948.[89] But these covert efforts—together with clandestine CIA support for anti-communist labor unions and intellectual organizations—could hardly have succeeded had there not already existed in Europe a widespread predisposition to see the Americans as the lesser of two evils, and perhaps even as a force for good. "I am entirely convinced," the French political theorist Raymond Aron insisted, "that for an anti-Stalinist there is no escape from the acceptance of American leadership."[90] French peasants did not see it all that differently.

The habits of democracy were no less significant when it came to defeated adversaries. The Roosevelt administration had planned to treat Germany harshly after the war; and even after the President himself backed away from the punitive Morgenthau Plan in late 1944, its spirit lingered in the occupation directive for American forces, JCS 1067, which prohibited doing anything to advance economic rehabilitation beyond the minimum necessary to avoid disease or disorder.[91] The American design for a postwar world based on economic integration and political self-determination seemed not to apply, or so at first it appeared, to occupied Germany.

Uneasiness about this inconsistency soon developed, though; and in any event Americans far from Washington customarily maintained a certain irreverence toward orders emanating from it. General Clay concluded almost at once that his instructions were unworkable and that he would either get them changed, sabotage them, or ignore them. Here he followed the lead of his own troops who, having found prohibitions against fraternizing with the Germans to be ridiculous, quickly devised ways of circumventing them. Confronted with inappropriate directives in a difficult situation, the American occupiers—with a breezy audacity that seems remarkable in retrospect—fell back upon domestic

instincts and set about transplanting democracy into the part of Germany they controlled.[92]

Soviet occupation authorities too, we now know, found themselves hampered by unclear directives ill-suited to the problems they faced; some of them managed to carve out a fair amount of autonomy, at times in defiance of Moscow's wishes.[93] But it was what was done with autonomy that made the difference. The Red Army, repeating its practices elsewhere in Eastern Europe, indulged in looting and physical assaults on so massive a scale that the full extent of it is only now becoming known: reparations extractions removed about a third of the Soviet zone's industrial capacity and Russian troops raped as many as *two million* German women in 1945 and 1946. As the historian Norman Naimark has emphasized,

> women in the Eastern zone—both refugees from further east and inhabitants of the towns, villages, and cities of the Soviet zone—shared an experience for the most part unknown in the West, the ubiquitous threat and the reality of rape, over a prolonged period of time.[94]

Whereas the American occupation authorities at first forbade fraternization but quickly reversed that policy, their Soviet counterparts initially encouraged such contacts but eventually had to prohibit them altogether because of the hostility they generated.[95] Certainly the Russians did little to evolve practices or build institutions that promised Germans within their zone—apart from Communist Party functionaries—a stake in their success.

The United States could of course hold out the prospect of economic recovery and the Soviet Union could not: this certainly made the advantages of democracy more evident than they might otherwise have been. But democratization, under Clay's leadership, was well under way before there was any assurance that Germans would receive Marshall Plan aid or anything comparable. Authoritarianism, which was all Moscow would or could provide, was by far the less attractive alternative.[96] "Soviet officers bolshevized their zone," Naimark has concluded, "not because there was a plan to do so, but because that was the only way they knew to organize society. . . . By their own actions, the Soviet authorities created enemies out of potential friends."[97] Or, as General Clay recalled years afterwards: "We began to look like angels, not because we were angels, but we looked [like] that in comparison to what was going on in Eastern Europe."[98]

The Americans simply did not find it necessary, in building a sphere of influence, to impose unrepresentative governments or brutal treatment upon the peoples that fell within it. Where repressive regimes already existed, as in Greece, Turkey, and Spain, serious doubts arose in Washington as to whether the United States should be supporting them at all, however useful they might be in containing Soviet expansionism.[99] Nor, having constructed their empire, did Americans follow the ancient imperial practice of "divide and rule." Rather, they used economic leverage to overcome nationalist tendencies, thereby encouraging the Europeans' emergence as a "third force" whose obedience

could not always be assumed. It was as if the Americans were projecting abroad a tradition they had long taken for granted at home: that civility made sense; that spontaneity, within a framework of minimal constraint, was the path to political and economic robustness; that to intimidate or to overmanage was to stifle. The contrast to Stalin's methods of imperial administration could hardly have been sharper.

VII

Stalin saw the need, after learning of the Marshall Plan, to improve his methods of imperial management. He therefore called a meeting of the Soviet and East European communist parties, as well as the French and the Italian communists, to be held in Poland in September 1947, ostensibly for the purpose of exchanging ideas on fraternal cooperation. Only after the delegations had assembled did he reveal his real objective, which was to organize a new coordinating agency for the international communist movement. Stalin had abolished the old Comintern as a wartime gesture of reassurance to the Soviet Union's allies in 1943, and the International Department of the Soviet Communist Party, headed by the veteran Comintern leader, the Bulgarian Georgii Dimitrov, had taken over its functions.[100] What had happened during the spring and summer of 1947 made it clear, though, that these arrangements provided insufficient coordination from Stalin's point of view.

Delegations arriving at Szklarska Poręba were greeted by a militant speech from Zhdanov, picturing the world as irrevocably divided into two hostile camps: "The frank expansionist program of the United States," he charged, was "highly reminiscent of the reckless program, which failed so ignominiously, of the fascist aggressors, who, as we know, also made a bid for world supremacy."[101] The attendees were then invited to consider—and after some reservations on the part of the Poles unanimously approved—a Soviet proposal for the creation of a "Cominform," its headquarters to be located in Belgrade, a pointed gesture in the light of Stalin's earlier concerns about independent tendencies among the Yugoslavs.[102] The French communist leader Jacques Duclos summed up the new procedures succinctly: "Paris and Rome will be able to submit their proposals, but they shall have to be content with the decisions to be adopted in Belgrade."[103]

Even with the Cominform in place, the momentary independence Czechoslovakia demonstrated must have continued to weigh on Stalin's mind. That country, more than any other in Eastern Europe, had sought to accommodate itself to Soviet hegemony. Embittered by how easily the British and French had betrayed Czech interests at the Munich conference in 1938, President Eduard Beneš welcomed the expansion of Soviet influence while reassuring Marxist-Leninists that they had nothing to fear from the democratic system the Czechs hoped to rebuild after the war. "If you play it well," he told Czech Communist Party leaders in Moscow in 1943, "you'll win."[104]

But Beneš meant "win" by democratic means. Although the Communists had indeed done well in the May 1946 parliamentary elections, their popularity began to drop sharply after Stalin forbade Czech participation in the Marshall Plan the following year. Convinced by intelligence reports that the West would not intervene, they therefore took advantage of a February 1948 government crisis to stage a *coup d'état*—presumably with Stalin's approval—that left them in complete control, with no further need to resort to the unpredictabilities of the ballot box.[105] This development came as no surprise in Washington: Kennan had predicted that the Soviet Union would sooner or later crack down on those East European states where communists did not fully dominate the government. Czechoslovakia had figured most prominently on that list.[106] But to an unprepared American and Western European public, the Prague takeover was the most appalling event yet in the emerging Cold War, occurring as it did in the country whose abandonment by the West only ten years earlier had led directly to World War II. There followed shortly thereafter the suicide, or murder, of Masaryk, son of the founder of the country and himself a symbol—now a martyr—to the fragility of Czech liberties.[107]

Because of its dramatic impact, the Czech coup had consequences Stalin could hardly have anticipated. It set off a momentary—and partially manufactured—war scare in Washington.[108] It removed the last Congressional objections to the Marshall Plan, resulting in the final approval of that initiative in April 1948. It accelerated plans by the Americans, the British, and the French to consolidate their occupation zones in Germany and to proceed toward the formation of an independent West German state. And it caused American officials to begin to consider, much more seriously than they had until this point, two ideas Bevin had begun to advance several months earlier: that economic assistance alone would not restore European self-confidence, and that the United States would have to take on direct military responsibilities for defending that portion of the Continent that remained outside Soviet control.[109]

Stalin then chose the late spring of 1948 to attempt a yet further consolidation of the Soviet empire, with even more disastrous results. Reacting to the proposed establishment of a separate West German state, as well as to growing evidence that the East German regime had failed to attract popular support, and to the introduction of a new currency in the American, British, and French sectors of Berlin over which the Russians would have no control, he ordered a progressively tightening blockade around that city, which lay within the Soviet zone. "Let's make a joint effort," he told the East German leaders in March. "Perhaps we can kick them out."[110] Initial indications were that the scheme was working. "Our control and restrictive measures have dealt a strong blow at the prestige of the Americans and British in Germany," Soviet occupation authorities reported the following month. The Germans believed that "the Anglo-Americans have retreated before the Russians," and that this testified to the latter's strength.[111] Suspend the new currency and the plans for a West German state, a self-confident Stalin told Western diplomats early in August, "and you shall no longer have any difficulties. That may be done even tomorrow. Think it over."[112]

But the Soviet leader's plans, by this time, had already begun to backfire. There was now a quite genuine war scare in the West, one that intensified pressures for an American–West European military alliance, accelerated planning for an independent West Germany, further diminished what little support the communists still had outside the Soviet zone, and significantly boosted President Truman's re-election prospects in a contest few at the time thought he could win.[113] Nor did the blockade turn out to be effective. "Clay's attempts to create 'an airlift' connecting Berlin with the western zones have proved futile," Soviet officials in that city prematurely reported to Moscow in April. "The Americans have admitted that the idea would be too expensive."[114] In fact, though, the United States and its allies astonished themselves as well as the Russians by improvising so successful a supply of Berlin by air that there was no need to make concessions. Stalin was left with the choice he had hoped to avoid—capitulation or war—and in May 1949, in one of the most humiliating of all setbacks for Soviet foreign policy, he selected the first alternative by lifting the blockade.[115]

The Berlin crisis demonstrated that Soviet expansionism in Europe had generated sufficient resistance from the United States and its allies to bring that process to a halt. Stalin had never been prepared to risk a military confrontation—at least not in the foreseeable future—and the West's response to the blockade, which included the deployment to British bases of apparently atomic-capable bombers, made it clear that further advances might indeed produce this result. The Soviet leadership, a Red Army general recalled many years later, had not been prepared to commit suicide over Berlin.[116]

There remained, though, the task of consolidating Soviet control over those territories where communists already ruled, and here too 1948 proved to be a turning point, because for the first time this process provoked open resistance. Despite appearances of solidarity, Soviet–Yugoslav relations had become increasingly strained following earlier disagreements over the Red Army's abuse of Yugoslav civilians, plans for a Balkan federation, and support for the Greek communists. The fiercely independent Yugoslavs were finding it difficult to defer to the Soviet Union, whose interests seemed increasingly at odds with those of international communism. Stalin himself alternated between cajoling and bullying their leaders, sometimes including them in lengthy late-night eating and drinking sessions at his dacha, at other times upbraiding them rudely for excessive ideological militance and insufficient attention to Moscow's wishes. Tensions came to a head early in 1948 when the Yugoslavs and the Albanians began considering the possibility of unification. Stalin let it be known that he would not object to Yugoslavia "swallowing" Albania, but this only aroused suspicions among the Yugoslavs, who remembered how the Soviet Union had "swallowed" the Baltic States in 1940 and feared that the precedent might someday apply to them. Their concerns grew when Stalin then reversed course and condemned Belgrade bitterly for sending troops into Albania without consulting Moscow.[117] By June of 1948, these disagreements had become public, and the communist world would never be the same again.

What had happened in Soviet–Yugoslav relations was, in one sense, only a continuation of the process by which Stalin came to recognize that East Europeans were not going to welcome the extension of Moscow's authority over them, while at the same time the East Europeans came to see just how coercive that authority was going to be. But the Yugoslavs alone had the capacity to resist: this communist government had not been installed by the Red Army and did not depend upon Soviet support to remain in power. Their experiences with Stalin had gradually transformed Tito and the other top Yugoslav communists from worshipful acolytes into schismatic heretics: the Soviet leader's personality proved no more "winning" for those who were in a position to make independent judgments than was the system he had created. The Soviet empire, it now appeared, would be able to maintain itself only by imposition; Tito's defection showed that whatever invitations might have been extended were likely to be withdrawn upon more intimate acquaintance.

Stalin responded to this insult in a wholly characteristic way: if he could not get at the Yugoslavs themselves, he would get at all other possible Yugoslav sympathizers elsewhere. There followed the East European purge trials, precise replicas of what Stalin had ordered within the Soviet Union a decade earlier when he detected heresy or the prospect of it.[118] By 1949–50, there were few overt Titoists left outside Yugoslavia. But there were also few people left—apart from the party and official bureaucracies who ran it—who believed that they had anything to gain from living within a Soviet sphere of influence: vast numbers of them now became closet Titoists, with results that would make themselves evident periodically over the years in places like East Berlin in 1953, Budapest and Warsaw in 1956, Prague in 1968, and everywhere all at once in 1989.

VIII

West Europeans were meanwhile convincing themselves that they had little to lose from living within an American sphere of influence. The idea of a European "third force" soon disappeared, not because Washington officials lost interest in it, but because the Europeans themselves rejected it.[119] The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which came into existence in April 1949, had been a European initiative from the beginning: it was as explicit an invitation as has ever been extended from smaller powers to a great power to construct an empire and include them within it.[120] When Kennan, worried that NATO would divide Europe permanently, put forward a plan later that spring looking toward an eventual reunification and neutralization of Germany as a way of ending both the Soviet and American presence on the continent, British and French opposition quickly shot it down.[121] The self-confidence he and other American officials had set out to restore in Western Europe could now manifest itself, or so it appeared, only from within a framework of reassurance that only the United States could provide.

Since incorporation within the Soviet empire reassured no one, it is worth asking: why the difference? Why were allies of the United States willing to give up so much autonomy in order to enhance their own safety? How did the ideas of sovereignty and security, which historically have been difficult to separate, come to be so widely seen as divisible in this situation?

The answer would appear to be that despite a postwar polarization of authority quite at odds, in its stark bilateralism, from what wartime planners had expected, Americans managed to retain the multilateral conception of security they had developed during World War II. They were able to do this because Truman's foreign policy—like Roosevelt's military strategy—reflected the habits of domestic democratic politics. Negotiation, compromise, and consensus-building abroad came naturally to statesmen steeped in the uses of such practices at home: in this sense, the American political tradition served the country better than its realist critics—Kennan definitely among them—believed it did.[122]

Bargains of one kind or another were struck at every step along the way in constructing the American sphere of influence in Western Europe. The Truman administration extended a postwar loan to Great Britain to replace Lend-Lease, but only on the condition that the Labour government dismantle barriers to foreign trade and investment. When the effect proved to be disastrous for the British economy, the Americans moved quickly to relieve the strain by assuming responsibility for economic and military assistance to Greece and Turkey; but at the same time they took advantage of that situation, by way of the Truman Doctrine, to issue a far more sweeping call for containing Soviet expansionism than either Bevin or Attlee had expected. The United States then extended its offer of reconstruction aid to all of Europe under the Marshall Plan, but only on the condition that recipients submerge their old national rivalries and move toward economic and political integration, including Germany in this process.

The West Europeans, unlike the Soviet Union, agreed to this, but soon found a condition of their own to impose upon the Americans. This was the requirement of a formal military alliance with the United States, to which Washington acquiesced—but with the understanding that the British, the French, and their immediate neighbors would in turn agree to the formation of an independent West German state. Confronted with this unpalatable prospect, the French made the best of it by justifying NATO to themselves as an instrument of "double containment,"[123] directed against *both* the Soviet Union and the Germans. This made it possible for them to shift from an emphasis on punishing Germany to one directed toward economic cooperation with that country in the form of the Schuman Plan to create a European Coal and Steel Community, an initiative that surprised but gratified the Americans, who had been seeking the resolution of Franco-German rivalries by pushing integration in the first place.[124]

Meanwhile, a less obvious series of social compromises was going on within Western Europe. The Americans worried about the "tilt" toward the Left that had taken place as a result of the war; at the same time, though, they were cautious about pressuring the Europeans to move toward more centrist politics. A few officials in Washington understood that what they called the "non-communist Left" could itself become a center of resistance against the Soviet Union;[125] there was also a more widespread fear that excessively overt pressure might backfire. The West Europeans, though, also made compromises. The United States did not *have* to pressure the French and the Italians very much to move toward the center because the leftward "tilt" in those countries had never extended so far as a rejection of capitalism in the first place. Their people could easily see that the American assistance and protection they wanted would be more likely if they themselves took the initiative in building centrist political coalitions.[126]

What is significant, then, is not simply that the West Europeans invited the United States to construct a sphere of influence and include them within it; it is also that the Americans encouraged the Europeans to share the responsibility for determining how it would function, and that the Europeans were eager to do this. Washington officials were themselves often genuinely uncertain about what to do, and that provides part of the explanation for this pattern of mutual accommodation. But it also developed because the American vision of national security had become international in character: Franklin D. Roosevelt's most important foreign policy legacy may well have been to convince the nation that its security depended upon that of others elsewhere, not simply on whatever measures it might take on its own. Habits of compromise growing out of domestic politics made it easier than one might have thought for a formerly isolationist nation to adapt itself to this new situation; and those compromises, in turn, allowed West Europeans to define their interests in such a way as to find *common* ground with those of the United States.

IX

It would become fashionable to argue, in the wake of American military intervention in Vietnam, the Soviet invasions of Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan, and growing fears of nuclear confrontation that developed during the early 1980s, that there were no significant differences in the spheres of influence Washington and Moscow had constructed in Europe after World War II: these had been, it was claimed, "morally equivalent," denying autonomy quite impartially to all who lived under them.[127] Students of history must make their own judgments about morality, but even a cursory examination of the historical record will show that these imperial structures could hardly have been more different in their origins, their composition, their tolerance of diversity, and as it turned out their durability. It is important to specify just what these differences were.

First, and most important, the Soviet empire reflected the priorities and the practices of a single individual—a latter-day tsar, in every sense of the word. Just

as it would have been impossible to separate the Soviet Union's internal structure from the influence of the man who ran it, so too the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe took on the characteristics of Stalin himself. The process was not immediate: Stalin did allow a certain amount of spontaneity in the political, economic, and intellectual life of that region for a time after the war, just as he had done inside the Soviet Union itself after he had consolidated his position as Lenin's successor in 1929. But when confronted with even the prospect of dissent, to say nothing of challenges to his authority, Stalin's instinct was to smother spontaneity with a thoroughness unprecedented in the modern age. This is what the purges had accomplished inside the USSR during the mid-1930s, and Eastern Europe underwent a similar process after 1947. There was thus a direct linkage from Stalin's earliest thinking on the nationalities question prior to the Bolshevik Revolution through to his management of empire after World War II: the right of self-determination was fine as long as no one sought to practice it.

The American empire was very different: one would have expected this from a country with no tradition of authoritarian leadership whose constitutional structure had long ago enshrined the practices of negotiation, compromise, and the balancing of interests. What is striking about the sphere of influence the United States established in Europe is that its existence and fundamental design reflected as frequently pressures that came *from those incorporated within it* as from the Americans themselves. Washington officials were not at all convinced, at the end of World War II, that their interests would require protecting half the European continent: instead they looked toward a revival of a balance among the Europeans themselves to provide postwar geopolitical stability. Even the Marshall Plan, an unprecedented extension of American assistance, had been conceived with this "third force" principle in mind. It was the Europeans themselves who demanded more: who insisted that their security required a military shield as well as an economic jump-start.

One empire arose, therefore, by invitation, the other by imposition. *Europeans* made this distinction, very much as they had done during the war when they welcomed armies liberating them from the west but feared those that came from the east. They did so because they saw clearly at the time—even if a subsequent generation would not always see—how different American and Soviet empires were likely to be. It is true that the *extent* of the American empire quickly exceeded that of its Soviet counterpart, but this was because *resistance* to expanding American influence was never as great.[128] The American empire may well have become larger, paradoxically, because the American *appetite* for empire was less that of the USSR. The United States had shown, throughout most of its history, that it could survive and even prosper without extending its domination as far as the eye could see. The logic of Lenin's ideological internationalism, as modified by Stalin's Great Russian nationalism and personal paranoia, was that the Soviet Union could not.

The early Cold War in Europe, therefore, cannot be understood by looking at the policies of either the United States or the Soviet Union in isolation. What

evolved on the continent was an interactive system in which the actions of each side affected not only the other but also the Europeans; their responses, in turn, shaped further decisions in Washington and Moscow. It quickly became clear—largely because of differences in the domestic institutions of each superpower—that an American empire would accommodate far greater diversity than would one run by the Soviet Union: as a consequence most Europeans accepted and even invited American hegemony, fearing deeply what that of the Russians might entail.

Two paths diverged at the end of World War II. And that, to paraphrase an American poet, really did make all the difference.