

The Undeclared Condominium

The USSR As Partner in a Conservative World Order

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Introduction

Although the Right has typically framed the Soviet Union and “International Communism” as an aggressive and subversive revolutionary force, the reality is — at the very least — considerably more nuanced. In fact, it would be more accurate to describe the USSR’s relations with the West over most of its history as collusive: it has facilitated capitalist states’ repression of revolutionary forces far more than it has backed such forces.

Soviet Russian foreign policy certainly went through a heady phase of anticipating international revolution in the years immediately after the Bolshevik Revolution. But following the failure of these revolutionary hopes — with the Spartacists in Germany, similar maximalists in Vienna, the soviet regime in Bavaria, and Béla Kun in Hungary, in 1919; and the catastrophic alliance of the Chinese Communist Party with the Kuomintang in 1927 — its relations with the outside world took on a considerably different character.

This was partly owing to Stalin’s combined caution and authoritarianism, and partly to the situation of the USSR given the stabilization of Bolshevik rule and failure of revolution abroad. The exact apportionment of causation is debatable, and indeed has been extensively debated.

But in any case the role of the Soviet Union in global affairs was, contrary to anti-communist ideological characterizations, comparatively conservative. In functional terms, the USSR acted more to constrain foreign revolutionary parties subject to its control than to aid them, and in the process helped to promote domestic stability in Western countries. This was true of the Soviet Union’s relationship with the multipolar world from the late 1920s until WWII, and even more true of its bipolar relationship with the United States from the wartime alliance of the 1940s through its political suicide in 1991. In the period immediately after WWII, in particular, America and Britain needed — and got — Stalin’s cooperation to restore capitalism in Western Europe.

For reasons of length, I chose not to include a considerable amount of material that would have been relevant to a broader understanding of the bipolar dynamic. In particular, I focused on the post-WWII role of the United States to the neglect of the history of decolonization and subsequent neocolonial policies by other Western countries. The extreme violence by Great Britain in Kenya and in the Congo by Belgium during the decolonization process, the extractive trade relationship between France and its former West African colonies, and the way European structuring of colonial regimes (e.g. the essentializing of sectarian and “tribal” differences, and rule through officials like Indian *zamindars* by elevating them to positions far beyond their traditional authority) affected their post-independence viability, would have added a great deal to this study.

I. The “International Civil War” (1917–1927)

According to Eric Hobsbawm, the Russian Revolution, in the decades after 1917, cast a shadow over the world comparable to that cast over 19th century Europe by the French. And it greatly exceeded the influence of the French Revolution, in the sense that Marxism-Leninism was “by far the most formidable organized revolutionary movement in modern history.”¹

¹ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century 1914–1991* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1994), p. 55.

In this period, international politics “can best be understood as a secular struggle by the forces of the old order against social revolution, believed to be embodied in, allied with, or dependent on the fortunes of the Soviet Union and international communism.”²

Arno Mayer describes in great detail the way Bolshevism and its threatened spread hung over the heads of the parties assembled for the Paris peace talks in 1918 and 1919.

In the event the Armistice was concluded just in time to limit the political consequences of military defeat in Central and East Central Europe to less than revolutionary proportions. But even with this eleventh-hour finish the legacy of disruption and convulsion was far from negligible.

Granted, neither Germany nor Austria went Spartacist; and Hungary remained Bolshevik for only 133 days.... But, the fact remains that there were grave disorders, rebellions, and strikes throughout defeated Europe, notably because politicians and labor leaders had ready-made organizational weapons with which to capitalize on political instability, unemployment, food shortages, and runaway prices.³

Throughout the final days of the war and the negotiations in Paris, the Western Allies were haunted by the specter of Bolshevism in Central Europe. There was real fear that the Spartacists would achieve control in Germany, and revolutionary socialists would come to power in Vienna, Bohemia and Budapest.⁴ In the Western Allies’ approach, “concern for containing the Revolution east of the Rhine tended to take precedence over the settlement of diplomatic scores.”⁵

[Despite serious differences in national interest between the Allies], the Paris Peace Conference made a host of decisions, all of which, in varying degrees, were designed to check Bolshevism: the victors made territorial concessions to Poland, Rumania, and Czechoslovakia for helping to stem the revolutionary tide beyond their own borders; they gave military assistance and economic aid to these and other border lands as well as to the Whites for their armed assault on Soviet Russia and Hungary; they stepped up their direct military intervention in Russia; they rigorously enforced the blockade against Bolshevik Russia and Hungary; they rushed economic assistance to Austria and the successor states to help stabilize their governments; and they drafted the charters of the International Labor Organization (I.L.O.) and the League of Nations with a view to immunizing the non-Bolshevik Left against the ideological bacillus of the Bolshevik Revolution.

Some of these measures constituted a defensive containment policy, a *cordon sanitaire* calculated to prevent the Revolution from spreading beyond Bolshevik-controlled areas; other measures were aimed at the outright overthrow of Lenin and Béla Kun. But all alike were decided, orchestrated, sanctioned, or condoned by the peacemakers in Paris....

² *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³ Arno J. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking: Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), p. 8

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–68, 73–74.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

At the time, the outcome of this first round in the international civil war of the twentieth century seemed to be very much in the balance....⁶

Lloyd George was typical of the Allied mindset in the period of panic after Béla Kun's accession to power: his greatest fear was that Germany might yet fall to the Spartacists and ally itself with Soviet Russia — in which case the outcome would be “spartacism from the Urals to the Rhine.”⁷

And from the perspective of Western leaders, the fears were reasonable. Workers' and soldiers' councils, in the first months of 1919, appeared throughout German cities, as well as in Budapest and Vienna (although the strength of Spartacists and other maximalist or pro-Bolshevik parties in them was at best uneven). Spartacism continued to smolder in Germany even after the violent suppression of the Council Republic in Berlin by the Freikorps; and in the meantime, soviet regimes appeared in Hungary and Bavaria, and for a time appeared imminent in Austria.

The Bolshevik menace served a useful domestic function in the West as well, justifying the repression not only of domestic radicalism and dissent of all kinds, but of even liberal reformism:

There are numerous indications that the clamor for a punitive peace was stirred up as part of a vast political design. Except for the protofascist new Right the leaders, parties, pressure groups, patriotic leagues, and newspapers that sparked this agitation also favored rigorously conservative or outright reactionary social and economic policies. In fact, the forces of order appear to have taken advantage of the intoxication of victory either to preserve or advance their class interests and status positions under an ideological cover which was a syncretism of jingoist nationalism, baleful anti-Wilsonianism, and rabid anti-Bolshevism. Whoever was not a superpatriot was denounced as a fellow traveler of the Bolsheviks and stood accused not only of disloyalty but also of advocating a sellout peace.

The revolutionary segments of the Socialist and labor movements were not the primary target of the jingoist cum anti-Bolshevik campaign. Its aim was to rout and disconcert the very core of the forces of change, to do so now, pre-emptively, before the fast-growing Left had a chance to rally around Wilson and to make political gains from the high cost of living, rising taxes, and the strains of reconversion. In addition to championing a Wilsonian peace, this Left — this non-Communist Left — was battling for the forty-eight-hour week, collective bargaining, graduated income taxes, and social welfare measures.⁸

The avowed principles of self-determination, embodied quite inconsistently in the provisions of the Versailles treaty, were belied by the Allies' unsuccessful proxy war against Soviet Russia through Kolchak and Denikin, and their successful one against the Kun regime through Rumania and the Slovaks.

Meanwhile, the exigencies of the “international civil war” served to legitimize authority on the Bolshevik side as well. Relatively soon after the October Revolution, the revolutionary global crusade was combined with an increasing attempt to subsume “world revolutionary forces” —

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 581–583.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

parties of the Left outside of Russia — under Bolshevik control through the Third, or Communist, International. This made a certain kind of sense, Hobsbawm argued, only on the assumption that a revolutionary wave was forthcoming in the West and that the international Left had to be disciplined as a vanguard force under Soviet leadership.

It was in 1920 that the Bolsheviks committed themselves to what in retrospect seems a major error, the permanent division of the international labour movement. They did so by structuring their new international communist movement on the pattern of the Leninist vanguard party of an elite of fulltime ‘professional revolutionaries’. The October revolution... had won wide sympathies in the international socialist movements, virtually all of which emerged from the world war both radicalized and enormously strengthened. With rare exceptions the socialist and labour parties contained large bodies of opinion that favoured joining the new Third or Communist International, which the Bolsheviks founded to replace the Second International..., discredited and broken by the world war it had failed to resist. Indeed, several, such as the Socialist Parties of France, Italy, Austria and Norway, and the Independent Socialists of Germany actually voted to do so, leaving the unreconstructed opponents of Bolshevism in a minority. Yet what Lenin and the Bolsheviks wanted was not an international movement of socialist sympathisers with the October revolution, but a corps of utterly committed and disciplined activists, a sort of global striking-force for revolutionary conquest. Parties unwilling to adopt the Leninist structure were refused admittance to or expelled from the new International, which could only be weakened by accepting such fifth columns of opportunism and reformism, not to mention what Marx had once called ‘parliamentary cretinism’.

The argument made sense on only one condition: that the world revolution was still in progress, and its battles were in immediate prospect. Yet while the European situation was far from stabilized, it was clear in 1920 that Bolshevik revolution was not on the agenda in the West, though it was also clear that in Russia the Bolsheviks were permanently established...⁹

The Bolsheviks still retained a hope for revolutionary success in Asia, until the failure of the KMT-CCP alliance and Jiang Jieshi’s suppression of the communists.

Yet even before this proof that even the East was not yet ripe for October, the promise of Asia could not conceal the failure of revolution in the West.

By 1921 this was undeniable. The revolution was in retreat in Soviet Russia, though politically Bolshevik power was unassailable. It was off the agenda in the West. The Third Congress of the Comintern recognized this without quite admitting it by calling for a ‘united front’ with the very socialists whom the Second had expelled from the army of revolutionary progress. Just what this meant was to divide the revolutionaries for the next generations. However, in any case it was too late. The movement was permanently split, the majority of left socialists, individuals and parties drifted back into the social-democratic movement, overwhelmingly led by

⁹ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, pp. 69–70.

anti-communist moderates. The new communist parties remained minorities of the European Left, and generally — with a few exceptions such as Germany, France or Finland — rather small, if impassioned minorities. Their situation was not to change until the 1930s....¹⁰

It was already becoming increasingly evident by mid-1919 — with the suppression of the Spartacists and the Bavarian soviet government in Germany, the failure of a council uprising in Vienna, and the later collapse of the Béla Kun regime in Hungary — that Soviet Russia would have to function as a nation-state within an international state system dominated by capitalist powers. The defeat of the British general strike in 1926 and Jiang's massacre of the Chinese Communist Party in 1927 made it completely clear.

Yet the years of upheaval left behind not only a single, huge but backward country now governed by communists and committed to the building of an alternative society to capitalism, but also a government, a disciplined international movement, and, perhaps equally important, a generation of revolutionaries committed to the vision of world revolution under the flag raised in October and under the leadership of the movement which, inevitably, had its headquarters in Moscow.... The movement may not have known quite how the world revolution was to advance after stabilisation in Europe and defeat in Asia, and the communists' scattered attempts at independent armed insurrection... were disasters.¹¹

II. The Normalization of Russia and Triumph of Conservatism (1927–1941)

Mayer's characterization of relations between Soviet Russia and the West as an "international civil war"¹² was technically accurate through the 1920s or so. It was a genuine international civil war, with the goal of world revolution on one side and counter-revolution on the other. It wound down with a series of events including the consolidation of Soviet power and defeat of the White armies and the failure of revolutionary projects, and more or less ended with the recognition of the USSR as a member of the Westphalian nation-state system. From the mid-1920s on there was continued political and ideological competition between the capitalist West and the Soviet regime; but it was the kind of controlled competition that prevails in oligopoly markets, in which the relationship is as collusive and mutually supportive as it is competitive.

Gabriel Kolko argues that it was the internal divisions of the international socialist movement before and during the war that left a vacuum for Lenin to fill, and the resulting deep split in the movement between communists and social democrats was the cause of socialism's failures in the interwar period.

Politically, the fact that the French, German, and Italian socialist parties were all suffering from grave internal contradictions produced a historic vacuum that was to

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

¹² See Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe, 1870–1956: An Analytic Framework* (New York, Evanston, San Francisco, London: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 13, in addition to *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking*.

prove fatal to world socialism.... [B]ecause the socialist parties and unions provided insufficient, if any leadership to antiwar sentiment within their nations, they produced a fatal vacuum in European and world socialism that Lenin and the Soviet Communist party easily filled. There was no consistency or coherence in Lenin's mercurial concepts on the nature of the party and the road to power, much less the form of a socialist society, and in this domain he was no less a pure opportunist than the social democrats, tailoring his position to the potential of the moment in order to grasp power. But Lenin was virtually the only European socialist leader who unequivocally damned the war and the imperialist claims of all nations, and it was the purity of this opposition alone that attracted a sufficient core of adherents to allow the permanent historic schism to emerge within the world socialist movement that preordained it to political impotence in innumerable countries for at least two decades.¹³

Russia's relations with the Left in Western countries was at best ambivalent during much of the interwar period, and at times one of outright abandonment, enmity, or betrayal. Hobsbawm remarks on the incongruity of the Comintern's "switch... into the rhetorical mode of ultra-revolutionism and sectarian leftism between 1928 and 1934," considering that "in practice the movement neither expected nor prepared for taking power anywhere."

The change, which proved politically calamitous, is... to be explained by the internal politics of the Soviet Communist Party, as Stalin took control of it, and perhaps also as an attempt to compensate for the increasingly evident divergence between the interests of the USSR, as a state which inevitably had to coexist with other states — it began to win international recognition as a regime from 1920 — and the movement whose aim was to subvert and overthrow all other governments.

In the end the state interests of the Soviet Union prevailed over the world revolutionary interests of the Communist International, which Stalin reduced to an instrument of Soviet state policy under the strict control of the Soviet Communist Party, purging, dissolving and reforming its components at will. World revolution belonged to the rhetoric of the past, and indeed any revolution was tolerable only if a) it did not conflict with Soviet state interest and b) could be brought under direct Soviet control.

This latter fact in particular became even more evident in the last days of WWII and the early postwar period, as Stalin not only not only used the Eastern European communist regimes as a naked "extension of Soviet power," but discouraged independent communist efforts — "even those which proved successful, as in Yugoslavia and China..."¹⁴

The influence not only of the Soviet example, but of the communist activism it inspired in other countries, meant that the Old Left was largely dominated by Marxism-Leninism.

So, in the generation after 1917, Bolshevism absorbed all other social revolutionary traditions, or pushed them on to the margin of radical movements. Before 1914 anar-

¹³ Gabriel Kolko, *Century of War: Politics, Conflict, and Society Since 1914* (New York: The New Press, 1994), pp. 119–120.

¹⁴ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, pp. 71–72.

chism had been far more of a driving ideology of revolutionary activists than Marxism over large parts of the world. Marx, outside Eastern Europe, was seen rather as the guru of mass parties whose inevitable, but not explosive, advance to victory he had demonstrated. By the 1930s anarchism had ceased to exist as a significant political force outside Spain, even in Latin America, where the black-and-red had traditionally inspired more militants than the red flag. (Even in Spain the Civil War was to destroy anarchism, whereas it made the fortunes of the communists, hitherto relatively insignificant.)...

In short, to be a social revolutionary increasingly meant to be a follower of Lenin and the October revolution, and increasingly a member or supporter of some Moscow-aligned Communist party; all the more so when, after the triumph of Hitler in Germany, these parties adopted the policies of anti-fascist union which allowed them to emerge from sectarian isolation and to win mass support among both workers and intellectuals.... The young who thirsted to overthrow capitalism became orthodox communists, and identified their cause with the Moscow-centered international movement....¹⁵

The irony, Hobsbawm notes, is that “this virtually complete take-over of the social-revolutionary tradition” came at a time when the Soviet Union had “plainly abandoned” its revolutionary optimism of 1917–1923. “From 1935 on, the literature of the critical left was filled with accusations that Moscow’s movements missed, rejected, nay betrayed the opportunities for revolution, because Moscow did not want it any more.”¹⁶

The Comintern’s strategy not only hobbled the political influence of foreign communist parties, but was so counterproductive as to actually facilitate Hitler’s rise to power.

So far from initiating another round of social revolution, as the Communist International had expected, the Depression reduced the international communist movement outside the USSR to a state of unprecedented feebleness. This was admittedly due in some measure to the suicidal policy of the Comintern, which not only grossly underestimated the danger of National Socialism in Germany, but pursued a policy of sectarian isolation that seems quite incredible in retrospect, by deciding that its main enemy was the organized mass labour movement of social-democratic and labour parties (described as ‘social-fascist’)*... In the Europe of 1934 only the French Communist Party still had a genuine political presence.¹⁷

* This went so far that in 1933 Moscow insisted that the Italian communist leader P. Togliatti withdraw the suggestion that, perhaps, social-democracy was not the primary danger, at least in Italy. By then Hitler had actually come to power. The Comintern did not change its line until 1934.¹⁸

In France, the Communist Party only reluctantly joined other forces of the Left against a right-wing power grab, and did so in violation of Comintern policy. In February 1934 the far right called

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 74–75.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 104n.

a demonstration against Daladier's "left of center" government, planning to invade the Chamber of Deputies and impose a right-wing government by force.

A night of vicious fighting followed, as demonstrators and police shot at one another, with a total of 15 deaths and 1,435 wounded. Daladier resigned the next day, fearing he could no longer keep order, and a 'right of centre' Radical replaced him. The far right had shown it had the strength to 'unmake' a government by force, and France seemed set to follow the path of Italy and Germany.¹⁹

At first the French communists gave little indication of any intent to abandon the strategy of sectarian isolation that the German communists had pursued leading up to Hitler's seizure of power. "The French left had previously seemed as incapable of responding as the left elsewhere.... The Communists repeated the 'third period' nonsense that the Socialist Party were 'social fascists'...."²⁰

But at the last minute they responded to the CGT's [Confédération Générale du Travail] call for a general strike with a demonstration of their own, "but separately from the other organisations." Surprisingly, as CGT and Communist Party demonstrators "drew close together, people began chanting the same anti-fascist slogans and melted into a single demonstration...."²¹

The success of the general strike and the united demonstration halted the right's advance. A formal agreement between the Communists and Socialists led to gains for both in elections at the expense of the Radicals....

Then the Communist Party went even further in its policy shift. It called for a pact not just with the Socialists, but with the Radical Party as well, on the grounds that although it was a bourgeois party it stood for preserving the republic....

However, the mood in the streets and workplaces was much more impressive than the Socialist-Radical government — after all, the two parties had held enough seats in parliament to have formed such a government at any point in the previous four years. A series of huge left wing demonstrations culminated in a 600,000-strong commemoration of the Paris Commune. The biggest wave of strikes France had ever known was beginning even before Blum's government took office....

The employers, who had been willing to look favourably on the advance of the far right only two years before, were now desperate for Blum to settle the strikes even if it meant making enormous concessions to the workers....

Among many workers there was a feeling they wanted more than just wage increases, a shorter working week and holidays. They wanted somehow to change society in its entirety.²²

At this point the Communist Party returned to its characteristic form, refusing to exploit the momentum on the Left and instead seeking a reformist deal with the bourgeois parties.

¹⁹ Chris Harman, *A People's History of the World* (Verso, 2008), p. 494.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 494.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 494–495.

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 495–496.

The strikes continued until 11 June, when the Communist Party intervened with a speech by its leader, Maurice Thorez. He claimed that since ‘to seize power now is out of the question’, the only thing to do was to return to work. ‘It is necessary to know how to end a strike,’ he said....

Thorez was right that conditions were not yet ripe for workers to take power, any more than they had been ripe in February or even July 1917. But they were such that the Communists could have put into effect the slogan they had ritually raised until only two years before— for the creation of soviets, structures of workers’ delegates which could oversee and challenge the power of the state and big business. However, Thorez did not even mention this, although the mood of workers would have ensured a favourable reception for such a call.²³

The reason, predictably, came from outside France. While the Comintern had ceased to denounce social democrats as “social fascists” and had begun to encourage united fronts against fascism, Stalin still took a conservative approach of pursuing broad unity with bourgeois liberal parties — even to the extent of forcing communists to renounce radical opportunities.

The abandonment of the absurd ‘third period’ policy had depended on changes in Comintern (Communist International) thinking in Moscow, as had the adoption of the policy of Popular Front alliance with a bourgeois pro-capitalist party. Stalin wanted foreign policy allies to cement the defence pact with the USSR signed by the right of centre Laval government in 1935. Communist support for a ‘liberal’ capitalist government seemed to make such an alliance easier. The Comintern accordingly argued that it was the only ‘practical’ way of blocking the path of fascism....²⁴

This same approach by Stalin and the Comintern — suppressing radicalism on the Left in order to make common cause with liberal capitalist forces — was repeated in Spain, and arguably led to Franco’s victory.

Chris Harman (whose impressions of Stalinism, we should keep in mind, are no doubt colored by the fact that he was not merely a Trotskyite but apparently a Schachtmanite of some sort) notes that while the Spanish Communist Party “had been founded a decade and a half earlier to counter the lack of politics of the anarcho-syndicalists and the reformism of the Socialist Party,”

successive expulsions had driven from the party any leaders who might question the line coming from Stalin in Moscow. And that line was now to promote a Popular Front with the bourgeois republicans. While the CNT and the Socialist Party left dithered about what to do about the government, the Communist Party and the Russian ambassador urged them to join a coalition government, abjure talk of revolution and restrict themselves to purely republican anti-fascist policies. They argued this would win the support of the middle classes, stop other capitalists and landowners going over to the fascists, and be looked on favourably by the French and British governments. It would also be able to unite the members of the various militias into

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 496–497.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 497.

a single, centralised army under the command of those professional officers who had stuck by the republic....²⁵

Hobsbawm seconds this assessment: “Both the Spanish government and, more to the point, the communists who were increasingly influential in its affairs, insisted that social revolution was not their object, and, indeed, visibly did what they could to control and reverse it.... Revolution, both insisted, was not the issue: the defence of democracy was.”²⁶

Orwell, likewise, noted that “the Communist Party, with Soviet Russia behind it, had thrown its whole weight against the revolution. It was the Communist thesis that revolution at this stage would be fatal and that what was to be aimed at in Spain was not workers’ control, but bourgeois democracy.”²⁷

Another contemporary account by Rudolf Rocker states that the Communists, “under orders from Moscow, at once lined up with the right.”

They, who previously had never been able to speak contemptuously enough of the C.N.T. and the Anarchists because of their “petty bourgeois” tendencies, suddenly turned defenders not only of the petty bourgeoisie, but of the Spanish big bourgeoisie, against the demands of the workers. Immediately after the occurrences of July, 1936, the Communist Party had proclaimed the slogan: For the Democratic Republic! Against Socialism! As early as August 8th of last year the Communist Deputy, Hernandez, had violently attacked the C.N.T. in Madrid because of the taking over of the industrial plants by the workers’ syndicates, and in that connection had declared that after Franco had been beaten they would soon bring the Anarchists to their senses.

In Spain..., the attacks of the Stalinists were directed... against all the accomplishments which had been born of the events of July, 1936. It was they who zealously urged upon the government the suppression of the workers’ patrols by the police; it was they who played themselves up as defenders of the middle class, in order to turn these against the workers....

The further the great transformation in economic and social life proceeded and brought agriculture and industry under the control of the workers’ syndicates, the harder would it be for the old powers in Spain to re-establish the old conditions. And this was just what the foreign capitalists dreaded most and were seeking by every means to prevent. But no one had rendered them such invaluable service in this matter as the Russian government and its instrument, the Communist Party of Spain. It was they who had everywhere put the most serious difficulties in the way of the constructive activity of the workers’ syndicates and who today are wantonly seeking to destroy a work which is of the very greatest importance for the social development of the country.²⁸

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

²⁶ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 162.

²⁷ George Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia* (San Diego, New York and London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1952, 1980), p. 51.

²⁸ Rudolf Rocker, *The Tragedy of Spain* (New York: Freie Arbeiter Stimme, 1937). Online version hosted by The Anarchist Library <<https://theanarchistlibrary.org/library/rudolf-rocker-the-tragedy-of-spain>>.

The Soviet Union was able to effectively dictate terms and push the Spanish government to the right because of its position as the major supplier of arms. It was no coincidence, Orwell noted, that Autumn of 1936, when the Soviet Union began supplying arms to the Republic, was also the beginning of its rightward shift.²⁹

This strategy of conciliating the bourgeois parties of the Republic extended even to forcibly suppressing the activism of anarchists and others on the Left.

However, respect for private property and maintenance of the old state machine in Spain in the autumn of 1936 did not mean merely restraining workers from struggle. It meant somehow – by persuasion or force – making workers surrender the gains they had made and give up control of the factories and estates they had taken over in July. It meant taking arms away from the workers who had stormed the barracks in July and handing them back to officers who had sat on the fence.

The Communist Party functionaries and right wing Socialists argued that any attempts by workers to make social revolution would mean a second civil war within the republican side. Yet their efforts to force workers to abandon their social conquests created precisely the elements of such a civil war. It was they, not the anarchists or the extreme left POUM, who withdrew soldiers and arms from the front for internal use. It was they who initiated fighting when workers refused to leave collectivised property or obey the orders of the refurbished bourgeois state. It was they who began armed clashes that cost hundreds of lives in Barcelona in May 1937, when they insisted on trying to seize the city telephone building that the CNT militia had conquered from the fascists nine and a half months earlier. And it was they who unleashed police terror against the left which involved the murder of leaders like Andrés Nin and the imprisonment of thousands of anti-fascist militants. There was no other way a militant working class could be forced to abandon its revolution and wait for ‘the end of the war’.³⁰

Hobsbawm, somewhat less critical, argues that the Soviet policy in Spain, rather than being a betrayal of revolutionary forces, was consistent with its gradualist approach elsewhere; and that its experience in Spain influenced its initial go-slow approach to Eastern Europe after WWII.

The interesting point is that this was not mere opportunism or, as the purists on the ultra-Left thought, treason to the revolution. It reflected a deliberate shift from an insurrectionary to a gradualist, from a confrontational to a negotiating, even a parliamentary, way to power. In the light of the Spanish people’s reaction to the coup, which was undoubtedly revolutionary, communists could now see how an essentially defensive tactic, imposed by the desperate situation of their movement after Hitler’s accession to power, opened perspectives of advance, i.e. a ‘democracy of a new type’, arising out of the imperatives of both wartime politics and economics. Landlords and capitalists who supported the rebels would lose their property; not as landlords and capitalists but as traitors. The government would have to plan and take over the economy; not for reasons for ideology but by the logic of war-economies.

²⁹ Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, p. 53.

³⁰ Harman, *A People’s History of the World*, pp. 506–507.

Consequently, if victorious, ‘such a democracy of a new type cannot but be the enemy of the conservative spirit... It provides a guarantee for the further economic and political conquests of the Spanish working people’.

The Comintern pamphlet of October 1936 thus described with considerable accuracy the shape of politics in the anti-fascist war of 1939–45. This was to be a war waged in Europe by all-embracing ‘people’s’ or ‘national front’ governments or resistance coalitions, which was waged by state-managed economies and ended, in the occupied territories, with massive advances in the public sector, due to the expropriation of capitalists, not as such but as Germans or collaborators with the Germans. In several countries of central and eastern Europe the road led directly from antifascism to a ‘new democracy’ dominated, and eventually swallowed by, the communists, but until the outbreak of the Cold War, the object of these post-war regimes was, quite specifically, *not* the immediate conversion to socialist systems or the abolition of political pluralism and private property.³¹

This same Comintern policy, as Harman recounts, was repeated yet again in the United States – in this case, forbidding excessive labor radicalism in the interest of accommodation with FDR:

In the following two years [1937–39] the CIO added just 400,000 members to those gained in its first 22 months. In 1939 the number of strikes was only half that of 1937. What is more, the union leaders increasingly reverted to collaboration with the employers and to restricting agitation by the membership. In the auto union there was an attempt to ban any publication not approved by the leadership, while there were to be no elections in the newly formed steel union for five years. The spontaneous grassroots militancy of 1934–36 gave way to tight control from above. Many activists tried to resist this trend. But, as in France and Spain, their efforts were made much more difficult by the behaviour of the Communist Party. It had played a leading role in the militancy of 1934–37, with many of its activists taking positions as organisers in the CIO union drive, and by their courage and daring had attracted large numbers of new recruits. Until 1935 the Communist Party insisted that Roosevelt was a capitalist politician and the New Deal a fraud. Then it made a U-turn and welcomed Roosevelt and the New Deal Democrats with its own version of ‘Popular Front’ politics. The party worked with the union leaders to spread illusions about the role of these politicians and to discipline rank and file trade unionists who might disrupt cosy relations with the Democrats. This continued for the next ten years, except for a brief interlude during the Hitler-Stalin pact at the beginning of the Second World War. It helped the union leaders establish bureaucratic control over most unions – a control which they would use in the 1940s to destroy any Communist influence.³²

His united front strategy having failed to prevent either Hitler’s repeated aggressions in Central Europe or Chamberlain’s deal at Munich, Stalin once again made an 180 degree turn; he

³¹ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, pp. 162–163.

³² Harman, *A People’s History of the World*, p. 517.

abruptly cut his own deal with Hitler, and ordered Western communist parties to cease their efforts to combat fascism.

After almost a decade of apparently total failure for the Comintern's line of anti-fascist unity, Stalin erased it from his agenda, at least for the time being, and not only came to terms with Hitler (though both sides knew that this could not last), but even instructed the international movement to abandon the anti-fascist strategy, a senseless decision perhaps best explained by his proverbial aversion to even the slightest risks.³³

III. The Post-WWII Duopoly

Introduction

Arno Mayer's characterization of post-WWII civil strife and revolution in the Global South, and the interaction between the USSR and the West in that arena, as a global civil war³⁴ is accurate to an extent; but at best, it was far less so than in the years immediately after WWI. In many ways, it would make more sense to identify the anticolonial struggles of the Global South as the primary axis of conflict, with the USSR giving limited and opportunistic support to those struggles when it carried little risk and otherwise opposing them.

The relationship between the two postwar superpowers was at least as much collusive as competitive. While the orientation of the United States toward revolutionary change was almost uniformly reactive or repressive, the USSR's backing for revolutionary change was cautious at best even when the revolutionary party was not controlled by Moscow, and grudging to hostile when it was either instigated by actors outside Soviet control or threatened the USSR's desired accommodations with the West.

As Noam Chomsky described the Cold War: "Putting second-order complexities aside," it was "for the USSR... primarily a war against its satellites, and for the US a war against the Third World. For each, it has served to entrench a particular system of domestic privilege and coercion." The mutual relations between the powers were, to a largely unrecognized degree, cooperative in that they served to justify each other's domestic system of power and to facilitate each other's control in their respective spheres of interest.³⁵

The USSR and the Division of the Postwar World

During WWII itself, Stalin was hopeful for a collaborative postwar relationship with the United States and Great Britain. With the commencement of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941, Stalin shifted from tolerating struggle against the British, French, and Dutch colonial authorities by communists in Asia and the Pacific Rim to demanding they subordinate anti-colonial struggles to their support for the Western war effort.

The anti-imperial struggle and the anti-fascist struggle, therefore, tended to pull in opposite directions. Thus Stalin's pact with the Germans in 1939, which disrupted the Western Left, allowed Indian or Vietnamese communists to concentrate happily

³³ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 164.

³⁴ Mayer, *Dynamics of Counterrevolution in Europe*, p. 30.

³⁵ Noam Chomsky, *World Orders Old and New* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 28.

on opposing the British and French; whereas the German invasion of the USSR in 1941 forced them, as good communists, to put the defeat of the Axis first, i.e. to put the liberation of their own countries much lower on the agenda. This was not merely unpopular, but strategically senseless at a time when the colonial empires of the West were at their most vulnerable, if not actually collapsing.³⁶

Vladimir Zubok, in a history of the Cold War incorporating newly opened Soviet archives, cites correspondence between Molotov and Stalin:

Hitler's attack on the USSR on June 22, 1941, and the Japanese attack on the United States on December 7, 1941, brought the two nations together for the first time... Even as the Nazis were advancing to the banks of the Volga, Roosevelt invited the Soviets to become co-organizers of the postwar security community. The American president told Molotov in Washington in negotiations in late May 1942 that "it would be necessary to create an international police force" in order to prevent war "in the next 25-30 years." After the war, Roosevelt continued, "the victors — the US, England, the USSR, must keep their armaments." Germany and its satellites, Japan, France, Italy, Rumania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia, "must be disarmed." Roosevelt's "four policemen," the United States, the United Kingdom, the USSR, and China, "will have to preserve peace by force." This unusual offer took Molotov by surprise, but after two days Stalin instructed him to "announce to Roosevelt without delay" that he was absolutely correct. In his summary of the Soviet-American talks of 1942, Stalin highlighted "an agreement with Roosevelt on the establishment after the war of an international military force to prevent aggression."

Roosevelt's friendliness to the Soviets at Tehran and Yalta "seemed to reveal his desire to secure a lasting partnership after the war."³⁷

But Gabriel Kolko notes that Stalin's enthusiastic willingness to abandon communist-led resistance forces and sacrifice their gains in U.S.- and British-occupied Axis territory predated not only Yalta but Churchill's cocktail napkin sketch of spheres of influence in Moscow the previous fall. In 1944 the Soviet Union approved the imposition of a conservative regime in Allied-occupied Italy, and from that time on "repeatedly endorsed Anglo-American political initiatives in those places of prime importance to them..."³⁸

Stalin and the Soviet foreign policy establishment expected Roosevelt to be reasonable about accommodating the USSR's interest in a strategic sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, and "believed that U.S.-Soviet cooperation, despite possible problems, would continue after the war." Molotov considered it both "profitable" and "important" to preserve the wartime alliance with the United States, and Litvinov considered it the main task of postwar Soviet policy to maintain good relations with both London and Washington and prevent the coalescence of the United States and UK into an anti-Soviet bloc.³⁹

³⁶ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 172.

³⁷ Vladislav M. Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), p. 11.

³⁸ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 272.

³⁹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, pp. 13-14.

As we shall see in greater detail below, the Western Allies established capitalist provisional governments in liberated Axis territory — often overseen by former Axis collaborators — and forcibly dispossessed leftist anti-fascist resistance movements from their gains on the ground. But they did so with the willing cooperation of Stalin who, for the sake of maintaining a postwar partnership with Roosevelt and Churchill, was quite happy to throw Western European communists under the bus and order them to submit — even when they might plausibly have been able to hold on to power against U.S. and British opposition. Kolko raises the question as to

why there was far less change in southern and western Europe after 1944, when armed Resistance forces might have filled the immense vacuum that the discredited traditional conservative classes created because so many of them were collaborators and fascists. Why, in such a context, there was no serious political crisis in any European country where the masses were radicalized, save Greece, reveals a great deal about the nature and objectives of the Soviet Union and the Communist parties, as well as the origins of the long peace in Europe that has begun to erode dramatically since their demise.⁴⁰

He elaborates on the last, very suggestive clause of this quote by further asking

whether the very existence of the Soviet Union itself, and its hegemony over Communist parties, indeed spared the remainder of Europe the basic political and social challenges they might have confronted, challenges comparable to the far greater dangers Europe's rulers faced after the much less destructive war of 1914–1918.⁴¹

Specifically, owing to his hostility to anything not subject to his absolute control, Stalin exerted a powerful restraining force on Western communist parties whose new mass memberships were considerably more radical and unpredictable than their leaders.

Given the overall balance of forces... in Greece, Italy, and France after 1943, the Left was closer to attaining dominant power in at least two of these nations than at any time before or since. The vast numbers who entered Communist and other parties were not deeply indoctrinated or disciplined ideologically.... [But] the Communists' real problem was not the possible weaknesses in the masses' commitments made late in the war, which Communist writers later cited to exonerate their parties' passivity at this crucial moment — notwithstanding the reality that the main, if not exclusive reason for their restraint was Stalin's policy.... The principal challenge confronting Stalin and his anointed leaders was to prevent the enormous numbers who enrolled from acting autonomously of the Party line, which is precisely what they did in Greece when reprisals left them no alternative. For the Communist elites the greatest threat inherent in large memberships under tight elite control was the possibility of losing absolute mastery of their parties' organizations.

...Had the Communists not existed, or not played the role of an anodyne for social discontent, then there certainly would have been many more strikes and social

⁴⁰ Kolko, *Century of War*, xix.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, xix-xx.

conflicts, and quite possibly more truly revolutionary challenges in southern and western Europe than the one in Greece....⁴²

Elsewhere, again, he stresses the central role of the communist parties in facilitating the restoration of capitalist rule in Western Europe: “during the critical period of 1944–1947 the Russians gave the Western European social system a reprieve during which to consolidate its power.”⁴³

The United Front strategy was the key to Communist political policy everywhere from 1943 through 1946, and well beyond then in France and Italy as well.... The only time the Left posed a true threat to Anglo-American interests occurred when the Russians did not fully control it or when the breakdown of the local social order was so complete that even the Communists could not prevent a sharp response from the masses.

After the war, many of the militants in the Communist movement who directed the leadership of the Resistance found official conservatism uncomfortable, and the pattern of internal purges within most postwar Communist parties followed the division between the bureaucratic conservatives and ex-Resistance militants, often depending on who spent the war in Moscow or in the home country. In Western Europe the Communists worked for elements of stability that reinforced the Old Order: no strikes, high production, and the like, and in fact took genuine pride in their very substantial administrative aid in restoring the Old Order in a refurbished form. Capitalism survived only where the Communists and Social Democrats were instrumental in reforming it. Elsewhere upheaval and collapse ensued and the Anglo-Americans and their allies had to apply sheer force against the revolutionary response of the people. In this sense the Left became the savior of Western European capitalism....⁴⁴

Kolko raises the question of what would have happened to Europe after the Axis defeat, had Stalin not existed. He mentions Tito’s independent Yugoslav communism as an example of the kinds of movements that might have come to power in eastern Europe, as well as confronting the Western Allies in Greece, Italy, and France.⁴⁵

In short, Stalin and western communist leaders who pledged allegiance to him desired disciplined party organizations under their centralized control not in order to wield them as instruments of revolution, but to *restrain* any revolutionary activity by their membership. Stalin and the western communist parties arguably performed a function analogous that of official union leaderships under the Wagner/NLRB regime in the United States of enforcing capitalist control against any potential direct action of the rank-and-file.

According to Harman, the agreements at Tehran, Potsdam and Yalta on the division of spheres of influence between the USSR and the Western Allies in Europe “were a death blow to the hopes of the resistance movements” and “gave Stalin’s armies a free hand in Eastern Europe.”

⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 304–305.

⁴³ Gabriel Kolko, *The Politics of War: The World and United States Foreign Policy, 1943–1945*. With new Preface and Epilogue by the Author (New York: Pantheon Books, 1968, 1990), p. 455.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

⁴⁵ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 307–308.

Stalin was not going to let Communists elsewhere upset the arrangement by attempting to lead revolutions, however favourable the mass of people might be. His former foreign minister Litvinov spelt it out bluntly to US representatives in Italy in September 1944: 'We do not want revolutions in the West'....

This was not just a matter of words. In the spring of 1944 the Italian Communist leader Togliatti had returned to Italy from Moscow. He announced that his party was joining the despised Badoglio government and was prepared to leave the monarchy untouched until the war was over. The French leader, Maurice Thorez, insisted from Moscow that the biggest resistance group, the Communist-led FTP, should integrate into and accept the leadership of de Gaulle's smaller FFI.⁴⁶

Unlike the situation of the other communist parties in Western Europe, the Italian Communist Party found itself taking second place in the Resistance to the Socialist Party, untainted by any collaboration with the fascist regime. The Communist Party was, as a result, not only quite small but also more militant than it likely would have been absent the need to compete with the socialists. It only underwent rapid expansion from 1943 on, and did not surpass the socialists in membership until 1946. "In a matter of only months the PCI went from being an inconsequential but disciplined Leninist sect to a mass party comprised of members whose future conduct was still unpredictable."⁴⁷

With the Allied victory in Italy the PCI, forbidden by Stalin to engage in insurrection, continued to organize itself as a mass party with the goal of achieving power electorally.

...[T]hey suppressed all ideological and class criteria for membership: there were no barriers for "religious faith or philosophical convictions," and their December 1945 platform defended private property, religious freedom, and the family.... But although it dreamed of becoming a party for all classes..., the overwhelming majority of its members still came from the urban working class and poorer rural elements.

The average Communist was, in brief, far from being a heavily indoctrinated, carefully screened revolutionary, but much more likely to be a part of a local social and human network that shared general political goals — a very personal arrangement that endured all sorts of vicissitudes and caused both the Party and its vote to increase over future years.

Aside from the very militant fourth of its membership in the until recently German-occupied north, the nature and strength of ideological commitments of most PCI members in March 1945 are difficult to discern.⁴⁸

Stalin's policy persisted into the late 1940s, to the extent of dissuading the PCI from any attempt at an insurrectionary seizure of power even if a communist electoral victory were overturned.

While the Berlin crisis was brewing, the imminent victory of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) in April 1948 threatened the balance of power in Europe. Historian Victor Zaslavsky has found ample evidence that the militants of PCI were prepared, if

⁴⁶ Harman, *A People's History of the World*, p. 537.

⁴⁷ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 291.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

necessary, to seize power by means of military insurrection. The PCI leader, Palmiro Togliatti, schooled in Stalinist “realism,” however, had grave doubts about the outcome of such an adventure. On March 23, Togliatti used secret channels to send a letter to Stalin, asking for advice. He warned the Kremlin leader that PCI’s military confrontation with the opposing political camp could “lead to a big war.” Togliatti informed Stalin that, in the case of a civil war in Italy, the United States, Great Britain, and France would support the anti-Communist side; then PCI would need the assistance of the Yugoslav army and the forces of other Eastern European countries in order to maintain its control over northern Italy. Togliatti’s letter evoked an immediate response from Stalin. He instructed PCI not to use “armed insurrection for any reasons” to seize power in Italy.⁴⁹

Hobsbawm, similarly, observes that “Except in their Balkan guerrilla strongholds, the communists made no attempt to establish revolutionary regimes...”

The communist revolutions actually made (Yugoslavia, Albania, later China) were made *against* Stalin’s advice. The Soviet view was that, both internationally and within each country, post-war politics should continue within the framework of the all-embracing anti-fascist alliance, i.e. it looked forward to a long-term coexistence, or rather symbiosis, of capitalist and communist systems, and further social and political change, presumably occurring by shifts within the ‘democracies of a new type’ which would emerge out of the wartime coalitions. This optimistic scenario soon disappeared into the night of Cold War, so completely that few remember that Stalin urged the Yugoslav communists to keep the monarchy or that in 1945 British communists were opposed to the breakup of the Churchill wartime coalition, i.e. to the electoral campaign which was to bring the Labour government to power. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Stalin meant all this seriously, and tried to prove it by dissolving the Comintern in 1943, and the Communist Party of the USA in 1944.

Stalin’s decision, expressed in the words of an American communist leader ‘that we will not raise the issue of socialism in such a form and manner as to endanger or weaken ... unity’ made his intentions clear. For practical purposes, as dissident revolutionaries recognized, it was a permanent goodbye to world revolution. Socialism would be confined to the USSR and the area assigned by diplomatic negotiation as its zone of influence, i.e. basically that occupied by the Red Army at the end of the war. Even within that zone of influence it would remain an undefined prospect for the future rather than an immediate programme for the new ‘people’s democracies’. History, which takes little notice of policy intentions, went another way – except in one respect. The division of the globe, or a large part of it, into two zones of influence, negotiated in 1944–45, remained stable. Neither side overstepped the line dividing them more than momentarily for thirty years. Both withdrew from open confrontation, thus guaranteeing that cold world wars never became hot ones.⁵⁰

Indeed [in 1945–47], where Moscow controlled its client regimes and communist movements, these were specifically committed to not building states on the model

⁴⁹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 76.

⁵⁰ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, pp. 168–169.

of the USSR, but mixed economies under multi-party parliamentary democracies, which were specifically distinguished from ‘the dictatorship of the proletariat’, and ‘still more’ of a single party. These were described in inner-party documents as ‘neither useful nor necessary’. (The only communist regimes that refused to follow this line were those whose revolutions, actively discouraged by Stalin, escaped from Moscow’s control, e.g. Yugoslavia.)⁵¹

Of course the dominance of communists in the anti-fascist resistance meant that when Axis occupation regimes collapsed, they were in the physical position to determine the successor regimes.

When the German army was finally defeated, with varying contributions from the local resistance movements..., the regimes of occupied or fascist Europe disintegrated, and social-revolutionary regimes under communist control took over, or attempted to take over, in several countries where the armed resistance had been most effective (Yugoslavia, Albania and – but for the British, and eventually US-backed military support – Greece).⁵²

But Stalin was entirely willing to deprive them of the advantage of this position when it suited his interests. In early 1944, he made it abundantly clear to the ELAS resistance that they would receive no Soviet aid, and that the British-backed government in exile in Cairo had his entire support. Indeed, Russian diplomats privately asked Churchill why he put up with ELAS (to borrow a line from *Animal Farm*: “If you have your lower animals to contend with, we have our lower classes”).⁵³ And at Yalta, he responded to Churchill’s repression of communist guerrillas in Greece with “I have every confidence in British policy in Greece.”⁵⁴ After repression by the right-wing government resulted in civil war in the late 40s, Stalin refused any support to the guerrillas. When Yugoslavia’s Tito and Bulgaria’s Dimitrov backed them, Stalin summoned them in early 1948 and angrily demanded they cease their support as “an impossible challenge to Anglo-American regional interests” – successfully in the case of Dimitrov, but not of Tito. Yugoslavia was shortly thereafter expelled from Cominform, finalizing the USSR-Yugoslav schism.⁵⁵

In response to critiques that any retention of power by Greek revolutionary forces would have been infeasible in any case, Kolko argues that America and Britain could not have forcibly overcome mass revolutionary action in Greece and Italy without jeopardizing their entire anti-German war efforts, and that domestic publics would not have supported such intervention.

But could such a revolutionary movement have taken power given the presence of massive Anglo-American armies? Communist writers have frequently argued that it would have been impossible.... But such skeptical judgments entirely disregard the larger context of the war with Germany, the purely military problems involved, as well as the formidable political difficulties that sustained counter-revolutionary wars would have encountered both in England and the U.S.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁵³ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 274–275. The *Animal Farm* allusion is mine, not Kolko’s.

⁵⁴ Harman, *A People’s History of the World*, p. 538.

⁵⁵ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 380–382.

It would have been entirely possible for French partisans to impose their control in central-western France following the Allied advance in mid-1944, and any Allied effort to displace them from power would have required the diversion of American and British troops from the anti-German offensive — at a time when, as it was, Germany was able to mount a serious counter-offensive in the Ardennes as late as December. American and British generals would quite likely have opposed such a move, which would have enabled Stalin to occupy more of Germany in the meantime. Likewise, had ELAS decided to forcibly resist British eviction from the territory they controlled in Greece, it would have required a much larger contingent of British troops and undermined their war effort against Germany. “In a word, there was ample reason to believe that had the armed Left been ready to take power in these three nations it would have succeeded in part, if not entirely, for at least an indefinite period.” Their potential for remaining in power was “at least” as great as that of the Bolsheviks in 1917. Further, domestic political opposition “would have been more formidable than even the military hazards.” To convince British and American publics — or the troops themselves — of the need for diverting troops from the war against Germany to put down anti-Axis resistance movements, and to replace them with fascist collaborators and monarchists, would have been “extremely difficult.”⁵⁶

Successful revolutionary action by autonomous communists in Greece, Italy, and perhaps France would have presented not only FDR and Churchill, but Stalin, with their worst nightmares: a leftist western Europe independent of both Western and Soviet control.

Perhaps almost as much as his cynical opportunism and desire for a European condominium with America and Britain, Kolko argues, Stalin’s abandonment of ELAS reflected his fear of any revolutionary forces not subject to his complete control.

...[I]t was at least as important that Stalin profoundly mistrusted the distinctive leftist combination that had emerged in Greece — its enthusiasm and creativity, its mass base and local initiative, and all those independent attributes and the lack of total internal discipline that he sought to expunge from Communist parties everywhere in Europe so as better to control them.

Even after the onset of the Cold War in 1946, Stalin pressured the Greek Communist Party (KKE) to participate in the British provisional government’s rigged elections and lend legitimacy to the regime.⁵⁷ The KKE leadership — to no avail, as it turned out — appeased both Stalin and Churchill by recognizing Greece as in Britain’s sphere of influence and asking merely to participate as a legal party in a united front government; it went so far as to limit itself to calling for public order following the Nazi withdrawal, and persuaded ELAS guerrillas to stay outside Athens and let British forces occupy the capital.⁵⁸

In France, Stalin followed the same pattern; he pursued “cordial relations” with de Gaulle from 1942 on and “loyally backed” his goal of postwar power in France to a greater extent than Roosevelt did. He “sternly rebuked any [communist] thought of taking power unilaterally,” and “assured de Gaulle in February 1942 that he would not incite the French to create a Communist regime....”⁵⁹ And as the U.S. and Britain attempted to come to agreement between themselves

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 306–307.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 275.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 276–277.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 284–285.

on the composition of the postwar provisional government in France, Stalin assured them (in Averill Harriman's words) "that it was the Soviet policy to leave the initiative in French policy to the British and ourselves" (i.e. the United States). After the liberation of Paris, Stalin continued to warn the Communist Party not to interfere with orders from de Gaulle or from the Western Allies.⁶⁰

Stalin's willingness to sacrifice foreign communists for the sake of friendly relations with the West held true in Asia as well. In China, Stalin distanced himself from Mao in order to cement his relationship with the Nationalist regime, and forced the Chinese Communist Party to agree to a truce with the Nationalists, in order to preserve his partnership with the United States.⁶¹

The USSR and Cold War Lockdown Over the Communist Bloc

As the Soviet army advanced into Eastern Europe, Stalin initially pursued a pluralistic approach to the provisional governments established in liberated countries. This was especially true in the case of Czechoslovakia, where prewar President Edvard Beneš maintained excellent relations with Stalin (who was the first major power to recognize his London government-in-exile in 1941). Beneš repeatedly blamed the West's inordinate fear of the Soviet Union and communism for the failure to stop Hitler in 1939, and stressed the need for a realistic understanding between the Western Allies and the USSR if postwar Europe were to be effectively stabilized.⁶² As Soviet troops prepared to enter Czechoslovakia in 1944, Stalin was the only Allied leader to sign a civil affairs agreement with the Beneš exile regime, promising not to intervene in Czech internal affairs.⁶³ In April 1945 — as the exile government returned to Czechoslovakia — Beneš gave the Communist Party seven of 25 ministries in his government; the CP leader, Clement Gottwald, was a national communist rather than a Stalinist, and was highly rated as a Czech patriot by the London exile community.⁶⁴ As Allied goodwill began to break down in 1945, the Soviet Union made it clear that, should the Western powers refuse to accept neutrality, Czechoslovakia would of necessity be expected to align with the USSR.⁶⁵ Czechoslovakia and Finland were outliers, on the most liberal side of Soviet Eastern European policy, but multi-party democracy in Czechoslovakia ended only in 1947 following several years of neutralism under a left-oriented coalition government, as part of a larger process of lockdown and sovietization in eastern Europe — a casualty of Cold War tensions.⁶⁶

In the aftermath of Hiroshima, Stalin began to focus increasingly on the need to secure Soviet control of Eastern Europe as a military buffer against the West.

Gromyko's son Anatoly cites his father as recalling that Hiroshima "set the heads of the Soviet military spinning. The mood in the Kremlin, in the General Staff was neurotic, the mistrust towards the Allies grew quickly. Opinions floated around to preserve a large land army, to establish controls over extended territories to lessen potential losses from atomic bombings. In other words, atomic bombing of Japan

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

⁶¹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, pp. 25–26.

⁶² Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp. 123–124.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, pp. 127–128.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

made us once again reappraise the meaning of the entire East European beachhead for the USSR.”⁶⁷

The new assertiveness of the United States after Hiroshima indicated to Moscow that the Americans wanted to challenge Soviet control over Central Europe and the Balkans. From that moment on, the issue for Stalin was not so much the presence of American military power in Germany but rather the maintenance of the Soviet military presence in Central Europe, above all in the Eastern Zone.⁶⁸

Stalin’s openness to fully sovietizing the occupation regimes in Eastern Europe increased in 1945, as the Western Allies toughened their line against the Soviet Union. On August 20–21, British and American representatives informed the Rumanian king and Bulgarian regent, along with Soviet occupation officials, that they would not recognize the new governments in those countries unless representatives of pro-Western parties were allowed to participate in elections; they also encouraged the domestic opposition to resist in the expectation of Western support. Stalin, seeing this as “atomic diplomacy” in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese bombings, ordered the Soviet military authorities to hold the line and make no alteration in the composition of the new Bulgarian government.⁶⁹ Stalin’s refusal to budge resulted in American recognition of the Bulgarian regime, in return for the appointment of token opposition figures to minor cabinet posts.⁷⁰

The pressure toward sovietization intensified in 1948, in response to the Marshall Plan.

Stalin had been considering strengthening his control over European Communist parties since 1946, but the establishment of the Cominform was accelerated by the Marshall Plan. It reflected Stalin’s conviction that, from now on, the Soviets could manage Central Europe only with iron ideological and party discipline. The Communist parties had to renounce “national roads to socialism;” they quickly became Stalinized and rigidly subordinate to Kremlin policies. The imposition of Stalinist controls led to the “purge” of Tito’s Yugoslavia.⁷¹

This was particularly true of the Soviet occupation zone in Germany, where sovietization proceeded apace. Stalin’s reading of the Marshall Plan left no room for German neutrality.⁷²

The rapid consolidation of the Soviet bloc in Central Europe brought about great changes in Soviet policies in Germany. They shifted decisively toward the creation of a Sovietized East Germany at the expense of the campaign for German unity. Stalin did not allow the SED [a union of the Communist and Social Democratic Parties, which Stalin has encouraged as a vehicle for pursuing an electoral road to socialism] to become a member of the Cominform. Yet, the SED leaders, including former Social Democrats, expressed unequivocal loyalty to the Soviet Union and denounced the

⁶⁷ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 354n.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 30–31.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 33–34.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Marshall Plan. In the fall of 1947, Stalin pushed the East German Communist leadership to organize military formations under the auspices of the German Directorate of the Interior, the police apparatus in the Soviet zone. In November 1947, a Department of Intelligence and Information was set up inside the Directorate of the Interior, with the goal of detecting and uprooting by extralegal methods any opposition to the East German regime.⁷³

In the rest of Eastern Europe, likewise, “[t]he USSR followed suit by eliminating the non-communists from their multi-party ‘people’s democracies’ which were henceforth re-classified as ‘dictatorships of the proletariat’, i.e. of the Communist Parties.”⁷⁴

In Asia, Stalin responded to the same “atomic diplomacy” by playing the CCP against the Jiang government in Manchuria, seeking an agreement with China that would cement the Soviet position in Manchuria and prevent the penetration of a US-Japanese alliance onto the mainland. When Jiang broke off talks under US pressure, Stalin gave Mao a green light to expand his attacks to the major cities.⁷⁵

Although they did so with caution and usually some reluctance, Stalin and subsequent Soviet leadership showed a willingness, in the last resort, to maintain Leninist regimes in power in Eastern Europe by force if necessary.

Although Eastern European uprisings against pro-Soviet regimes are commonly framed in the west as being anti-socialist, the closest approach to an accurate generalization would be to characterize them as libertarian socialist, recuperating Marxist notions of worker empowerment against anti-democratic and anti-worker authorities. This was nowhere more evident than in the 1953 uprisings in the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, which were sparked by an increase in work norms. As Chris Harman points out, the participants were anything but right-wing:

The sections of workers who struck were those who had been the most left wing during the Weimar Republic of the 1920s. Some 68 percent of those purged from the Communist Party in East Berlin for taking part in the rising had been members before Hitler’s rise to power. They were old militants who saw the rising as a continuation of the struggle for workers’ control to which they had dedicated their youth.⁷⁶

Indeed workers at the Stalin Allee construction project responded to placation attempts by Minister of Mines Selbmann by taunting: “We are the real communists, not you.”⁷⁷

In 1956 the Soviet leadership went through a scare over Gomulka’s “Polish road to socialism,” but managed to bring him back into line without military intervention.

Beginning in late summer 1956, Poland had become a hotbed of unrest in the Soviet bloc. The collective leadership, despite the recent reconciliation with Tito’s Yugoslavia, viewed the slogan, “Polish road to socialism,” as the beginning of the end

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁷⁴ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 238.

⁷⁵ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, pp. 35–36.

⁷⁶ Harman, *A People’s History of the World*, p. 563.

⁷⁷ Andy Blunden, “East Germany, June 1953” (1993). Hosted at libcom.org <<https://libcom.org/article/east-germany-june-1953>>.

for the Warsaw Pact. In their internal discussions, the Presidium members used the same language as Pravda used: “The [Western] imperialists” seek “to separate us,” using the language of national roads, “and defeat one by one.” With the aim of proping up the loyal Polish Communists, the Presidium agreed to remove Soviet KGB advisers from Polish security organs and provide economic assistance to the Polish state. But the experience in the GDR in 1953 was fresh on its mind.

The Kremlin’s concern turned into panic on October 19, 1956, when it learned that the Polish Communists were convening a plenum, without any consultation with Moscow, to replace Edward Ochab as their leader with Wladyslaw Gomulka, who had been expelled from the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) (the Communist Party of Poland) and imprisoned from 1951 to 1954 for “nationalist deviations.” At the same time, the Polish leadership demanded that Soviet advisers in the Polish army also leave, as well as Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, a Soviet citizen of Polish descent who had been appointed by Stalin as Poland’s minister of defense. Khrushchev and other Kremlin potentates immediately flew to Warsaw and attempted to bully Gomulka and his Polish colleagues with tough words and raw power, using the presence of Soviet troops on Polish soil. The Kremlin delegation returned home on October 20 in an agitated mood. On that day, the Presidium concluded that “the remaining solution is to terminate what is going on in Poland.” The notes of Vladimir Malin at this point become especially cryptic, but it is probable that the Kremlin rulers decided to take preliminary steps to use Soviet troops and replace the Polish leadership. After Rokossovsky was removed from the PUWP Politburo, however, the collective leadership temporized. Suddenly, Khrushchev suggested “tolerance” and admitted that “military intervention, under the circumstances, must be cancelled.” The Presidium unanimously agreed.

The main reason for this surprising change must have been Gomulka’s speech at the plenum after the Kremlin delegation left Poland. He pledged to build “socialism” and fulfill obligations to the Warsaw Treaty Organization.⁷⁸

The Soviet Union intervened in Hungary only after a period of internal dissension in the leadership over how to respond.

On October 23 [1956], Budapest and the rest of Hungary rose up against the Communist regime.... On October 26, both supporters and secret enemies of Khrushchev in the Presidium approved the introduction of Soviet troops into Budapest. On October 30, the Presidium, however, switched to the policy of negotiations and authorized a declaration on new principles guiding Soviet relations “with other socialist countries.”

Foreign observers had long considered this declaration a perfidious trick on the part of Moscow, but historians have recently learned that this declaration resulted from the complex debates at the Presidium that ended with the decision to forgo the use of military force in Hungary. The failure of the first indecisive use of Soviet troops to extinguish the uprising in Budapest and the number of casualties tipped the scales.

⁷⁸ Zubok, pp. 114–115.

From Budapest, Mikoyan, the Presidium special emissary, defended the policy of negotiations and compromise with consistency and courage. Mikhail Suslov, another emissary, was obliged to do the same. Zhukov and Malenkov supported the withdrawal of troops....

The proposal to leave Hungary alone split the Presidium. Bulganin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich defended the Soviet right to interfere in the affairs of “fraternal parties.” This, of course, meant that Soviet military force could be used to restore Communist regimes. Then Foreign Minister Shepilov delivered an eloquent speech in favor of withdrawal. He said that the course of events revealed “the crisis in our relations with the countries of people’s democracy. Anti-Soviet elements are widespread” in Central Europe, and, therefore, the declaration should be only the first step toward “elimination of the elements of diktat” between the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw Pact. Zhukov, Ekaterina Furtseva, and Matvei Saburov spoke one after another in favor of withdrawal.

The noninterventionist momentum was reversed on the following day, October 31, when the Presidium voted with the same unanimity to order Marshal Ivan Konev to prepare for decisive military intervention in Hungary....

Some scholars have attributed this startling flip-flop to external events, above all, the reports of the gruesome lynching of Communists in Hungary, Gomulka’s fears that the collapse of Communism in Hungary would cause Poland to be next, and the Franco-British-Israeli aggression against Egypt. There was also a large “spillover” effect inside the Soviet Union itself: unrest in the Baltics and Western Ukraine and student hunger strikes and demonstrations in Moscow, Leningrad, and other cities....

The decisive news that tipped the scales was the declaration by the Hungarian leader Imre Nagy that his government had decided to remove Hungary from the Warsaw Pact.⁷⁹

Contrary to the propaganda line of both the Soviet Union and the United States, the Hungarian uprising — like the prior revolt in East Germany — was not an attempt at capitalist restoration. It was at minimum a foreshadowing of Czechoslovakia’s attempt at “socialism with a human face” a decade later, and arguably an authentic libertarian socialist revolution.

Peter Fryer, who was sent to Hungary by the British Communist Party paper, the *Daily Worker*, reported:

...the striking resemblance [of these committees to] the workers’, peasants’ and soldiers’ councils which were thrown up in Russia in the 1905 Revolution and in February 1917... They were at once organs of insurrection — the coming together of delegates elected in the factories and universities, mines and army units — and organs of popular self government which the armed people trusted.

A section of the regime tried to regain control of the movement, very much as Gomulka was doing in Poland, by putting another disgraced Communist, Imre Nagy, at the head of a coalition government. But on 4 November — just as Britain, France

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 115–117.

and Israel were attacking Egypt — Russian tanks swept into Budapest and seized key buildings. They faced bitter armed resistance, which they eventually crushed only by killing thousands, reducing parts of the city to rubble, and driving more than 200,000 to flee across the border into Austria. A general strike paralysed the city for more than a fortnight and the Greater Budapest Central Workers' Council fulfilled the role, in effect, of an alternative government to Russia's puppet ruler, Janos Kadar. But eventually the workers' councils were crushed too and their leaders sentenced to years in prison....

The official Communist line was that the revolution was simply a pro-capitalist escapade planned by Western spies. As in so many other cases in the Cold War era, the most common account of the revolution in the West was very similar. It claimed that the revolution simply aimed to establish a 'free society' along Western capitalist lines. In fact most of those who played a leading role in the revolution had a wider perspective. They remembered the pre-war dictatorship which had ruled Hungary in the name of capitalist 'freedom' and looked to a different system in which workers' councils would play a key role, even if the speed of events did not give them time to clarify what this system might be. Anyone who doubts this should read the various collections of documents from Hungary 1956 which have been published since.⁸⁰

The Prague Spring, of course, was the actual locus of the slogan "socialism with a human face." As Harman recounts:

Leading figures in the party forced the president and party secretary Novotny to resign. Intellectuals and students seized the opportunity to express themselves freely for the first time in 20 years. The whole apparatus of censorship collapsed and the police suddenly appeared powerless to crush dissent. The students formed a free students' union, workers began to vote out state-appointed union leaders, ministers were grilled on television about their policies, and there was public discussion about the horrors of the Stalin era.

Petr Cerny argues that the so-called Prague Spring itself was merely Dubcek's attempt to replace the Stalinist Party leadership with technocrats. What really mattered was the wave of activism from below that it inadvertently unleashed. Cerny notes the role of workers' councils, as in Hungary in 1956.

One can only speculate what might have happened in Czechoslovakia, in 1968, if the situation had really got out of control.... But there are certain hints. Just as in 1956 in Hungary, Workers' Councils began to be formed and showed remarkable resilience in the struggle.⁸¹

Also as in Hungary, the Soviet leadership vacillated over whether to resort to direct military intervention, but in the end decided in favor.

⁸⁰ Harman, *A People's History of the World*, pp. 564–565.

⁸¹ Petr Cerny, "Czechoslovakia 1968: What socialism? What human face?" *Solidarity* (London) Pamphlet No. 55 (1985). Hosted at Libcom.org <<https://files.libcom.org/files/solidarity-London-55.pdf>>, p. 2.

But all archival evidence demonstrates that throughout the Czechoslovak crisis Brezhnev hoped to avoid “extreme measures,” that is, military invasion. Instead, he preferred to increase political pressure on Dubcek and the Czechoslovak leadership. Brezhnev feared that a Soviet invasion could trigger a NATO response, leading to a European war...

On July 26–27, the Politburo, presided over by Brezhnev, decided to set a provisional date for the invasion of Czechoslovakia. The Soviets continued, however, to negotiate with Dubcek and the Czechoslovak leadership. Brezhnev, among others, tried to bully “Sasha” Dubcek into drastic measures to reverse liberalization and reforms. Once all their attempts failed, the Kremlin leaders finally made the decision on August 21, and the forces of the Soviet Union and other countries of the Warsaw Pact (except for Rumania) occupied Czechoslovakia.⁸²

Even so, the level of passive resistance was such that the Soviets were forced to restore the leadership, under a tight leash, and work through them to bring the country under control.

They expected to be able to crush the dissent overnight, but the immediate effect was to deepen and widen it. There was limited physical resistance to the Russian tanks, but enormous passive opposition. Russia was forced to allow the Czechoslovakian government to return home with a promise to bring the dissent under control. It was nine months, interspersed with demonstrations and strikes, before this promise was fulfilled. Eventually Russia succeeded in imposing a puppet government which silenced overt opposition by driving people from their jobs and in some cases imprisoning them. Stalinist state capitalism was to run Czechoslovakia for another 20 years.⁸³

Even after the restoration, there were ongoing efforts by workers to recuperate workers’ councils — originally imposed by the state as a controlled reform effort — into genuine organs of self-management. Even after Dubcek announced a discontinuation of workers’ councils, workers at several enterprises continued to elect them in defiance.⁸⁴ In the Soviet Union, *Pravda* ran an article attacking the very idea of workers’ councils as “anti-communist propaganda from the imperialist camp.”

He warned that ‘the demand to hand over enterprises entirely to ownership-and-management-of-production collectives is particularly dangerous.’ ‘Anarcho-syndicalism is a step towards corporatism and fractionalism, towards degeneration and capitalism in socialist society.’ Further ‘it would undermine the authority of the Communist Parties.’⁸⁵

The Soviet leadership was extremely reluctant to invade Poland in response to destabilization by the Solidarity movement, even as a last resort; Brezhnev knew it would end any hope for a

⁸² Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, pp. 207–208.

⁸³ Harman, *A People’s History of the World*, p. 580.

⁸⁴ Cerny, “Czechoslovakia 1968,” p. 11.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 11–12.

revival of detente, and even Andropov and Suslov were apprehensive about the consequences. In the end, Brezhnev was able to maneuver Jaruzelski into declaring martial law in order to avoid direct intervention.⁸⁶

The Soviet Union in the Post-Colonial World

For most of the postwar period, Soviet activity in the Third World was cautious and non-revolutionary.

For several decades the USSR took an essentially pragmatic view of its relations with Third World revolutionary, radical and liberation movements, since it neither intended nor expected to enlarge the region under communist government beyond the range of Soviet occupation in the West, or of Chinese intervention (which it could not entirely control) in the East.⁸⁷

Stalin kept Third World radicals like Nasser and Mossadegh at arm's length, regarding them with suspicion and failing to capitalize on their nonalignment with the West.⁸⁸ Khrushchev, in contrast, saw the potential of anti-Western sentiment in Arab nationalist regimes, and sought closer ties.

The struggle against Molotov and the search for spectacular achievements led Khrushchev and his supporters to rediscover the potential of Arab nationalism in the Middle East. In July 1955, immediately after the devastating criticism of Molotov at the Party Plenum, the Presidium sent Khrushchev's new favorite Central Committee secretary, Dmitry Shepilov, on a reconnaissance mission to the Middle East. Shepilov met Nasser and invited him to Moscow; he also began to establish friendly relations with leaders of other Arab states who refused to join the Western blocs. Shepilov came back to Moscow from the Middle East convinced that the region had great potential for another "peace offensive" against the Western powers. Andrei Sakharov and other nuclear designers happened to be invited to the Presidium on the day that it discussed Shepilov's report. An official explained that the leaders were discussing a decisive change of principles of Soviet policy on the Middle East: "From now on we will support the Arab nationalists. The longer-term target is the destruction of the established relations of the Arabs with Europe and the United States, creation of the 'oil crisis' — this will generate problems for Europe and will make it more dependent on us." In the midst of the strategic stalemate in Europe and the Far East, this region provided a new outlet for the Kremlin's renewed optimism and ideological romanticism.

The consequences of this policy turn were immediate. The languishing Egyptian-Czechoslovak talks on the sale of arms rapidly came to a successful conclusion, and a flood of Soviet-designed Czechoslovak weaponry streamed into Egypt and Syria. Moscow supplied Egypt with half a million tons of oil and agreed to provide atomic energy technology. To no avail, concerned Western and Israeli officials tried to remonstrate against new Soviet policies publicly and privately. The struggle between Moscow and the West for the Arab Middle East was beginning: in the next two

⁸⁶ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, pp. 266–267.

⁸⁷ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 435.

⁸⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 109.

decades, it would generate an unprecedented arms race in the region and produce three wars. In the immediate future, Moscow would be triumphant and destroy Western plans of containment on the southern flank of the Soviet Union. At the same time, as in the case of the GDR, heavy Soviet investment in its Arab clients would turn Egypt and Syria into major assets, similar to East Germany, that the Kremlin could not afford to lose. The Middle Eastern venture began as a geopolitical gamble, but it ended as a contributing factor to the Soviet imperial overstretch of the 1970s.⁸⁹

Even so, Khrushchev limited himself for the most part to seeking a common anti-Western alignment with the existing bourgeois nationalist regimes in the Third World, rather than actively promoting revolutionary change. At least until the intervention into Angola and Mozambique in the 1970s, Soviet support for communist revolutions in the Third World was generally in response to pressure from the latter.

Both sides, Hobsbawm states, tacitly accepted the boundaries of each other's zones of influence, and during the 1950s and 1960s no indigenous revolutionary changes appeared on the globe to disturb this balance, except in Cuba. He adds:

The revolutions of the 1950s in the Middle East, Egypt in 1952, and Iraq in 1958, contrary to Western fears, did not change the balance, in spite of providing much scope for USSR diplomatic success, chiefly because the local regimes eliminated their own communists ruthlessly, where they were influential, as in Syria and Iraq.⁹⁰

This process continued in the Khrushchev years, as “a number of home-grown revolutions, in which communist parties played no significant part, came to power under their own steam, notably in Cuba (1959) and Algeria (1962).”

African decolonisation also brought to power national leaders who asked for nothing better than the title of anti-imperialist, socialist and friend of the Soviet Union, especially when the latter brought technical and other aid not tainted by the old colonialism: Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana, Sekou Touré in Guinea, Modibo Keita in Mali, and the tragic Patrice Lumumba in the Belgian Congo, whose murder made him a Third World icon and martyr. (The USSR renamed the Peoples' Friendship University it established for Third World students in 1960, 'Lumumba University'.) Moscow sympathized with such new regimes and helped them, though soon abandoning excessive optimism about the new African states. In the ex-Belgian Congo it gave armed support to the Lumumbist side against the clients or puppets of the USA and the Belgians in the civil war (with interventions by a military force of the United Nations, equally disliked by both superpowers) that followed the precipitate granting of independence to the vast colony. The results were disappointing. When one of the new regimes, Fidel Castro's in Cuba, actually declared itself to be officially communist, to everyone's surprise, the USSR took it under its wing, but not at the risk of permanently jeopardising its relations with the USA. Nevertheless, there is no real evidence that it planned to push forward the frontiers of communism by revolution

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 109–110.

⁹⁰ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, pp. 397, 397n.

until the middle 1970s, and even then the evidence suggests that the USSR made use of a favourable conjuncture it had not set out to create. Khrushchev's hopes, older readers may recall, were that capitalism would be buried by the economic superiority of socialism.

Indeed, when Soviet leadership of the international communist movement was challenged in 1960 by China, not to mention by various dissident Marxists, in the name of revolution, Moscow's parties in the Third World maintained their chosen policy of studied moderation. Capitalism was not the enemy in such countries, insofar as it existed, but the pre-capitalism, local interests and the (US) imperialism that supported them. Armed struggle was not the way forward, but a broad popular or national front in which the 'national' bourgeoisie or petty bourgeoisie were allies. In short, Moscow's Third World strategy continued the Comintern line of the 1930s against all denunciations of treason to the cause of the October revolution...⁹¹

Like most of the other Third World nationalist leaders who made common cause with the USSR, Castro was initially ambivalent at best toward the local communist party.

Though radical, neither Fidel nor any of his comrades were communists nor (with two exceptions) even claimed to have Marxist sympathies of any kind. In fact, the Cuban Communist Party, the only such mass party in Latin America apart from the Chilean one, was notably unsympathetic until parts of it joined him rather late in his campaign. Relations between them were distinctly frosty. The US diplomats and policy advisers constantly debated whether the movement was or was not pro-communist — if it were, the CIA, which had already overthrown a reforming government in Guatemala in 1954, knew what to do — but clearly concluded that it was not.

However, everything was moving the Fidelist movement in the direction of communism, from the general social-revolutionary ideology of those likely to undertake armed guerrilla insurrections to the passionate anti-communism of the USA in the decade of Senator McCarthy, which automatically inclined the anti-imperialist Latin rebels to look more kindly on Marx. The global Cold War did the rest. If the new regime antagonized the USA, which it was almost certain to do, if only by threatening American investments, it could rely on the almost guaranteed sympathy and support of the USA's great antagonist. Moreover, Fidel's form of government by informal monologues before the millions, was not a way to run even a small country or a revolution for any length of time. Even populism needs organization. The Communist Party was the only body on the revolutionary side which could provide him with it. The two needed one another and converged. However, by March 1960, well before Fidel had discovered that Cuba was to be socialist and he himself was a communist, though very much in his own manner, the USA had decided to treat him as such, and the CIA was authorized to arrange for his overthrow...⁹²

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 435–436.

⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 43.

The Soviet model of development encouraged authoritarian, bureaucratic regimes in the Third World.

Conversely, the ideologies, the programmes, even the methods and forms of political organization which inspired the emancipation of dependent countries from dependency, backward ones from backwardness, were Western: liberal; socialist; communist and/or nationalist; secularist and suspicious of clericalism; using the devices developed for the purposes of public life in bourgeois societies – press, public meetings, parties, mass campaigns, even when the discourse adopted was, and had to be, in the religious vocabulary used by the masses. What this meant was that the history of the makers of the Third World transformations of this century is the history of elite minorities, and sometimes relatively minute ones, for – quite apart from the absence of the institutions of democratic politics almost everywhere – only a tiny stratum possessed the requisite knowledge, education or even elementary literacy....

None of this means that the Westernising elites necessarily accepted all the values of the states and cultures they took as their models. Their personal views might range from 100 per cent assimilationism to a deep distrust of the West, combined with the conviction that only by adopting its innovations could the specific values of the native civilization be preserved or restored. The object of the most wholehearted and successful project of ‘modernization’, Japan since the Meiji Restoration, was not to Westernize, but on the contrary to make traditional Japan viable. In the same way, what Third-World activists read into the ideologies and programmes they made their own was not so much the ostensible text as their own subtext. Thus in the period of independence, socialism (i.e. the Soviet communist version) appealed to decolonized governments, not only because the cause of anti-imperialism had always belonged to the metropolitan Left, but even more because they saw the USSR as the model for overcoming backwardness by means of planned industrialization, a matter of far more urgent concern to them than the emancipation of whatever could be described in their countries as ‘the proletariat’. Similarly while the Brazilian Communist Party never wavered in its commitment to Marxism, a particular kind of developmental nationalism became ‘a fundamental ingredient’ in Party policy from the early 1930s, even when it conflicted with labour interests considered separately from others’. Nevertheless, whatever the conscious or unconscious objectives of those who shaped the history of the backward world, modernization, that is to say, the imitation of Western-derived models, was the necessary and indispensable way to achieve them.⁹³

The Soviet Union took a cautious approach to actual communist movements in the Third World, attempting to be a restraining influence at least much as a support.

Previously, the Soviet leadership had not ascribed any geopolitical importance to Vietnam and Indochina. They sought, in vain, to dissuade Hanoi from starting the war against the South. They feared, historian Ilya Gaiduk concludes, that this war

⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 202–203.

would be “an impediment to the process of détente with the United States and its allies.” The direct U.S. intervention, however, forced the Politburo’s hand. Now the ideological call for “fraternal duty” prevailed.⁹⁴

In a February 1965 trip to Hanoi, Kosygin tried and failed to dissuade North Vietnam from full-scale war against the United States.⁹⁵

Even in the case of Cuba’s mid-1970s adventures in the former Portuguese colonies in southern Africa, Yuri Andropov confided after the fact to veteran diplomat Oleg Troyanovsky that “the Soviets ‘were dragged into Africa’ against their best interests.”⁹⁶ The Soviet leadership itself was “incapable of bold schemes and initiatives.”

It took other dynamic and ideologically motivated players to drag the Soviet leaders into the African gambit, including Angola’s Agostino Neto and Ethiopia’s Mengistu Haile Mariam, but especially Fidel Castro and his revolutionary colleagues in Cuba. Contrary to U.S. belief, the Cuban leaders were not mere puppets or surrogates of Moscow. Since the 1960s, Fidel and Raul Castro, Che Guevara (until his death in 1967), and other Cuban revolutionaries had supported revolutionary guerrilla operations in Algeria, Zaire, Congo (Brazzaville), and Guinea-Bissau. The flight of the United States from Vietnam in 1975 was, Cubans believed, a chance for another round of anti-imperialist struggles in sub-Saharan Africa.⁹⁷

...According to one version, Gromyko, Grechko, and Andropov recommended that the Politburo send modest nonmilitary assistance to the MPLA but cautioned against direct involvement in the Angolan civil war. A few days later, however, the International Department transmitted the Angolan request for arms to the Politburo. After briefly hesitating, the same troika reversed its position and supported the request. In early December 1974, immediately after the Vladivostok summit, the pipeline for military assistance was opened. This reversal may have been the result of lobbying by Soviet and Cuban friends of Neto, as well as bureaucratic logrolling in the absence of Brezhnev’s direct involvement.⁹⁸

...Two weeks after the signing of the Final Act in Helsinki, Castro sent Brezhnev a plan for transporting Cuban regular military units to Angola. At that time, Brezhnev flatly refused to expand Soviet military assistance in Angola or to transport Cubans there. Yet, by November, puzzlingly, the first Cuban combat troops were fighting on the side of MPLA. Kornienko later asserted that the Cubans outfoxed the Soviet military representatives in Cuba, making them believe that they had authorization from the Kremlin to fly them across the ocean. Gromyko, Grechko, and Andropov were surprised; they agreed that Cuban involvement could lead to a sharp American reaction, complications for détente, and even tension around Cuba itself. Meanwhile, the Cubans had already begun “Operation Carlota” to save the MPLA. What makes

⁹⁴ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 198.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

this story even more puzzling is the total absence of evidence coming from the Cuban archives in Havana.

Two years earlier, Brezhnev had done nothing to assist the collapsing socialist government of Salvador Allende in Chile and rejected his plea for loans.⁹⁹

Increasing Integration of the USSR Into the Capitalist World Order

One might even argue that, as the USSR fell behind in its struggle to offer a rival model of economic development, it went beyond collaborative competition and was to some extent actually integrated into the capitalist world economy.

In the immediate post-WWII period, the world communist movement lived in hope – and many in Western ruling circles in fear – that the USSR would be competitive with the West in terms of economic growth. Only in the 1960s did it become clear that this had been an illusion.¹⁰⁰ The idea of international politics as a struggle between two social systems, represented by two superpowers, became “increasingly unrealistic”; by the 1980s “it had as little relevance to international politics as the Crusades.”¹⁰¹

Third-world countries believed only public action could lift their economies out of backwardness and dependency. In the decolonised world, following the inspiration of the Soviet Union, they were to see the way forward as socialism. The Soviet Union and its newly extended family believed in nothing but central planning.¹⁰²

The Soviet Union was progressively pigeonholed into what was essentially a Third World export-oriented model in the international division of labor.

...[S]o far from becoming one of the industrial giants of world trade, the USSR appeared to be internationally regressing. In 1960 its major exports had been machinery, equipment, means of transport, and metals or metal articles, but in 1985 it relied for its exports primarily (53 per cent) on energy (i.e. oil and gas). Conversely, almost 60 per cent of its imports consisted of machinery, metals etc. and industrial consumer articles. It had become something like an energy-producing colony of more advanced industrial economies – i.e. in practice largely its own Western satellites, notably Czechoslovakia and the German Democratic Republic, whose industries could rely on the unlimited and undemanding market of the USSR without doing much to improve their own deficiencies.¹⁰³

The trouble for ‘really existing socialism’ in Europe was that, unlike the inter-war USSR, which was virtually outside the world economy and therefore immune to the Great Slump, now socialism was increasingly involved in it, and therefore not immune to the shocks of the 1970s. It is an irony of history that the ‘real socialist’ economies of Europe and the USSR, as well as parts of the Third World, became the

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁰⁰ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 53.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

real victims of the post-Golden Age crisis of the global capitalist economy, whereas the ‘developed market economies’, though shaken, made their way through the difficult years without major trouble, at least until the early 1990s. Until then some, indeed, like Germany and Japan, barely faltered in their forward march. ‘Real socialism’, however, now confronted not only its own increasingly insoluble systemic problems, but also those of a changing and problematic world economy into which it was increasingly integrated....

...For oil producers, of whom the USSR happened to be one of the most important, [the oil crisis] turned black liquid into gold. It was like a guaranteed weekly winning ticket to the lottery. The millions simply rolled in without effort, postponing the need for economic reform and, incidentally, enabling the USSR to pay for its rapidly growing imports from the capitalist West with exported energy. Between 1970 and 1980 Soviet exports to the ‘developed market economies’ rose from just under 19 per cent of total exports to 32 per cent.¹⁰⁴

The West’s Vision of Postwar World Order

The basic doctrine behind America’s vision of the postwar world was stated by Cordell Hull as early as 1935: “It is the collapse of the world structure, the development of isolated economies that has let loose the fear which now grips every nation, and which threatens the peace of the world.”¹⁰⁵ Far from a mere idealistic vision of international comity, this reflected specifically American economic interests. In 1936, Assistant Secretary of State Francis Sayre, chairman of Roosevelt’s Executive Committee on Commercial Policy, warned: “Unless we can export and sell abroad our surplus production, we must face a violent dislocation of our whole domestic economy.”¹⁰⁶

These views amounted to a restatement of what had been the general American view of things – which William Appleman Williams called “Open Door Empire” – since the beginning of the 20th century. The Roosevelt administration saw the guarantee of American access to foreign markets as vital to ending the Depression and the threat of internal upheaval that went along with it.

FDR’s ongoing policy of Open Door Empire, confronted with the withdrawal of major areas from the world market by the autarkic policies of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere and Fortress Europe, led directly to American entry into World War II. The Open Door Empire ideology was reflected in the Grand Area concept formulated by State Department planners in the period immediately leading up to American entry into the Second World War.

On September 12, 1939, the State Department and the Council on Foreign Relations began a joint planning project to analyze various long-term problems of the war, and to plan a postwar order. Its conclusions were to be presented as a recommendation to the Department of State and President Roosevelt. After the fall of France, policy planners were horrified at the possibility that Germany might defeat Britain, capture some portion of its fleet, and cut off the Empire from

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 473–474.

¹⁰⁵ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 244.

¹⁰⁶ William Appleman Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1959, 1962), p. 170.

U.S. commerce.¹⁰⁷ Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long warned that “every commercial order will be routed to Berlin and filled... somewhere in Europe rather than in the United States,” resulting in “falling prices and declining profits here and a lowering of our standard of living with the consequent social and political disturbances.”¹⁰⁸

The Economic and Financial Group, one of the project’s five study groups, accordingly began a study of U.S. dependence on world markets and resources, and the viability of economic autarky within the Western Hemisphere in the event the war cut the U.S. off from its traditional spheres of interest. The group divided the world into major blocs, and created an input-output analysis of the production and trade of each bloc and its dependence on outside trade. It found that the Western Hemisphere would not be viable on its own; the United States required, at the least, a larger economic bloc of the Western Hemisphere, the British Empire, and the Far East (together comprising what was later called the “Grand Area”). On October 19, 1940, the study group issued its conclusions in Memorandum E-B19, arguing the need to integrate the non-German world under U.S. economic leadership.¹⁰⁹

Meanwhile, increasing portions of the Far East were being integrated into Japan’s Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere. Japan envisioned the latter as its own version of the Grand Area, eventually encompassing Indochina, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, and the Philippines, in addition to the already occupied areas of Korea, Manchuria, and northern China. Japan considered control of this area necessary for economic self-sufficiency, particularly in raw materials.¹¹⁰

The Economic and Financial Group met on November 23 to consider measures to prevent Japan from conquering Southeast Asia and shutting out the U.S.¹¹¹ On December 14 all five study groups met with a State Department representative and issued a memorandum to Cordell Hull and FDR dated January 15, 1941, stating that it was essential for the U.S. to maintain access to the raw materials of the Philippines, Malaya, and the Dutch East Indies. It proposed aid to China to tie down Japanese forces, air and naval assistance to the defense of Southeast Asia, and an embargo on war materiel to Japan.¹¹² Within six months the United States implemented its recommendations of aid to China and an embargo against Japan, beginning a chain of events that led to war.¹¹³

Cordell Hull, in May 1941, stated America’s economic aims for the postwar world in terms that were classic Open Door Empire:

“Extreme nationalism” could not be expressed “in excessive trade restrictions” after the war. “Non-discrimination in international commercial relations must be the rule,” and “Raw material supplies must be available to all nations without discrimination,” including the careful limitation of commodity agreements affecting the consumer nations, such as the United States. Lastly, in regard to the reconstruction of world

¹⁰⁷ Laurence H. Shoup and William Minter, “Shaping a New World Order: The Council on Foreign Relations’ Blueprint for World Hegemony, 1939–1945,” in Holly Sklar, ed., *Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management* (Boston: South End Press, 1980), pp. 136–139.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, “American Foreign Relations, 1920–1942,” p. 247.

¹⁰⁹ Shoup and Minter, “Shaping a New World Order,” pp. 136–139.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 142–143.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 139–140.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

finance, “The institutions and arrangements of international finance must be so set up that they lend aid to the essential enterprises and the continuous development of all countries, and permit the payment through processes of trade consonant with the welfare of all countries.”¹¹⁴

In a July 1942 public address on economic war aims, Hull elaborated on his earlier vision:

The future required American leadership in the world economy, “the opposite of economic nationalism,” or a new internationalism which many American allies feared was synonymous with American hegemony over the world economy. To the colonial nations Hull’s often repeated words conveyed undertones of a new colonialism: “Through international investment, capital must be made available for the sound development of latent natural resources and productive capacity in relatively undeveloped areas.” And the supreme role of the United States in this global undertaking struck many Allies as potentially damaging to their interests: “Leadership toward a new system of international relationships in trade and other economic affairs will devolve very largely upon the United States because of our great economic strength. We should assume this leadership, and the responsibility that goes with it, primarily for reasons of pure national self-interest.”¹¹⁵

The problem of access to foreign markets and resources was central to U.S. policy planning for a postwar world. Given the structural imperatives of “export dependent monopoly capitalism,”¹¹⁶ the threat of a postwar depression was real. Already, during the Great Depression of the 1930s, the American economy was unable to operate at the level of output needed to fully utilize its production capacity. Wartime industrial expansion exacerbated this problem immensely by vastly expanding plant and equipment at taxpayer expense. The domestic market was simply incapable of absorbing sufficient output to keep the wheels of industry turning. Fears of a postwar depression, when military procurement orders ceased and service-members were thrown back on the civilian job market, weighed heavily on U.S. leadership.¹¹⁷ A world free from restrictions on the export of both American capital and American goods, by imperial trading blocs or autarkic arrangements by regional powers, was therefore very much a matter of national self-interest from the capitalist perspective of its policy-makers.

In November 1944, in an address to the Congressional committee on Postwar Economic Policy and Planning, Dean Acheson warned of the consequences if the war were to be followed by a slide back into depression.

...[I]t seems clear that we are in for a very bad time, so far as the economic and social position of the country is concerned. We cannot go through another ten years like the ten years at the end of the twenties and the beginning of the thirties, without having the most far-reaching consequences upon our economic and social system.”

¹¹⁴ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 248.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 250–251.

¹¹⁶ A term coined by Joseph Schumpeter in his essay “Imperialism.” *Imperialism, Social Classes: Two Essays by Joseph Schumpeter*. Translated by Heinz Norden. Introduction by Hert Hoselitz (New York: Meridian Books, 1955) pp. 79–80.

¹¹⁷ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp. 252–253.

The problem was markets, not production. “You don’t have a problem of production.... The important thing is markets. We have got to see that what the country produces is used and is sold under financial arrangements which make its production possible.” Short of the introduction of a command economy, with controls over income and distribution to ensure the domestic consumption of all that was produced, the only way to achieve full output and full employment was through access to foreign markets.¹¹⁸

Based on their experience of the Depression — along with the resulting revolutionary and military upheavals of the 30s — American leadership wished above all to “prevent its recurrence.” They “did not simply wish to repair the prewar world economy, but to reconstruct it anew. There was a remarkable unanimity in Washington on this objective, and it was by far the most extensively discussed peace aim, surpassing any other in the level of planning and thought given to it.”

The American leadership would achieve this by creating a rational postwar global political and economic order. “In the last analysis the solution to the world’s political problems could be found in a rationally ordered world economy, and this guiding assumption colored United States response to specific problems in Europe, Asia, and Latin America continuously during World War II and thereafter.”¹¹⁹ The resulting policy vision entailed securing Western postwar control, under American leadership, over the markets and resources of the global “Grand Area” through institutions of global economic governance.

The United States, accordingly, began planning for postwar reconstruction and an American-dominated world order even before it entered the war. CFR Memorandum E-B34, dated July 24, 1941, stressed the importance of the Grand Area structure in reorganizing the postwar world, and especially integrating the European economies under American leadership, in the event of U.S.-British victory.¹²⁰ Integration required “a conscious program of broadly conceived measures for... securing the full use of the economic resources of the whole area.”¹²¹ It followed up on an earlier memorandum of July 10 in recommending the creation of global financial institutions to stabilize currencies and promote investment and development in backward areas — what eventually became the Bretton Woods institutions.¹²²

The Grand Area had to be protected, above all, from “defection from within” by any power which sought to remove its resources and markets from the integrated global economy. This vision of a “Free World” under U.S. leadership, and of any power which threatened U.S. hegemony as an “aggressor” to be “contained,” considerably predated the emergence of the USSR as the specific power playing the “aggressor” role.

Starting very early in the war, policy planners unabashedly defined U.S. global hegemony as the central war aim. On December 15, 1941, Isaiah Bowman, head of both the CFR and the Territorial Study Group, wrote *Foreign Affairs* editor Hamilton Fish Armstrong that the United States had to “think of world-organization in a fresh way,” and refrain from throwing away its arsenal at the moment of victory. “It must accept world responsibility.... The measure of our victory will be the measure of our domination after victory.” On January 16, 1942 Bowman stated in a memorandum that the U.S. after victory would have to adopt a broader vision of its security interests,

¹¹⁸ Williams, *The Tragedy of American Diplomacy*, pp. 235–236.

¹¹⁹ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 245.

¹²⁰ Shoup and Minter, “Shaping a New World Order,” p. 141.

¹²¹ G. William Domhoff, *The Power Elite and the State* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 1990), pp. 161–162

¹²² Shoup and Minter, “Shaping a New World Order,” pp. 141–142.

to include areas “strategically necessary for world control.”¹²³ So the United States already saw its future hegemony over the other Western Powers — and more particularly the Third World — as a necessity, at a time when the day-to-day survival of the Soviet Union was in grave doubt, let alone any future bipolar competition with a nuclear-armed communist superpower.

Norman Davis, Chairman of the Security Subcommittee of the State Department Advisory Committee on Postwar Foreign Policy (and also CFR President) stated in a meeting of the committee on May 6, 1942 that the British Empire “as it existed in the past will never reappear and that the United States may have to take its place.” At the same meeting, General George V. Strong, who had worked on the State Department-CFR War-Peace Studies project in 1940, advocated “a mental view toward world settlement which will enable us to impose our own terms, amounting perhaps to a pax-Americana.”¹²⁴

The first requirement for the postwar economic order was a guarantee of access to raw materials in the Third World. Charles P. Taft, director of the State Department’s Office of Wartime Economic Affairs, predicted in May 1944 that most metals and oil would eventually have to be imported. It was therefore necessary to export goods and capital, for which the developing world could pay only in raw material exports. This required, in turn, a new version of the “Open Door” — not, as before, mere parity of all foreign interests with the most favored nation, but also parity of foreign with domestic interests. This meant no protection, not import substitution at all, for promoting Third World industrialization.¹²⁵

The second requirement was expanded foreign markets to absorb increased output and prevent a postwar depression. The War Production Board in April 1944 estimated that victory in Europe would release two million soldiers and 3.5 to 4 million civilian workers from employment, and reduce demand for industrial output by \$27 billion. That meant replacing the lost war output with an enormous increase in consumer goods production. And as Harry Hawkins, director of the State Department’s Office of Economic Affairs, explained, “the American domestic market can’t absorb all that production indefinitely. There won’t be any question about our needing greatly increased foreign markets.”¹²⁶

Finally, the postwar order required foreign outlets for America’s surplus capital. In an economy with such high levels of existing fixed capital and high capital-labor ratios, further inputs of capital had reached the point of diminishing returns. The economy simply could not absorb large amounts of additional investment with any prospect of decent returns. Compounding the problem, there was an enormous glut of wartime savings, which could not be profitably invested in domestic industry.¹²⁷ Dean Acheson later looked back nostalgically on the British colonial system of the nineteenth century, which enabled Britain to export capital and maintain domestic political stability.

...[A] system for the export of capital, much greater than our hand-to-mouth efforts, is necessary. The system has been destroyed which expanded the power of Western Europe and permitted industrial development in societies in which individual liberty survived.¹²⁸

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 146–147.

¹²⁵ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 254.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹²⁸ Dean Acheson, *Power and Diplomacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), pp. 19–20.

American plans for the postwar world came into direct conflict with those of its British allies. In the American vision, a unified world market free of regional economic blocs was to be enforced by the United States, as hegemonic global power.

The United States determined to oppose its other allies' creating blocs and spheres of interest, but also to shape the future United Nations in a manner that acknowledged not just great power among the members of the Security Council, but also the distinctive role of the United States as the most powerful nation on earth.¹²⁹

In contrast to the American vision of a single global economic order, presumably enforced by the United States as senior partner in a global concert and with the United Nations as a barely disguised glove for the American fist, Britain envisioned a postwar world of regional blocs — including its own Imperial trade preference and sterling monetary bloc, and a Western European economic and security bloc under British leadership — an arrangement “which would leave England with the empire and a predominant position in a united Europe.”¹³⁰ This was the main source of friction between the Americans and British during the war.¹³¹

American pressure, reinforced by the leverage of Lend-Lease, was sufficiently great to exact Britain's assent to the vague terms of Article IV of the Atlantic Charter: “...they will endeavor with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States... of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity.” But during the war the U.S. was still unable to obtain a British renunciation of a sterling bloc or of imperial preference.¹³²

With the end of the war in Europe and the termination of Lend-Lease, the rapid deterioration of the British financial situation and their desperation for American financial assistance put an end to the struggle on American terms.¹³³

The West As Counter-Revolutionary/Counterinsurgent Power

To the same extent or greater than the end of WWI, the United States late in WWII found itself faced with “the problem of the Left, the nascent civil war within a world war in the form of masses in revolt throughout the globe...”¹³⁴

Despite the actual nature of Stalin's policy as conservative and stabilizing — even to the point of facilitating the West's control of its sphere of influence — the Western powers saw themselves as confronted with a revolutionary situation fueled by “International Communism,” which it was their task to halt. And indeed the peoples of Europe and the colonial world *were* radicalized — but they were hindered by Stalin and his successors as least as much as helped. At the same time, the West unwittingly pushed them onto far more radical paths than would have been the case had they been able to participate in the reformist coalitions Stalin urged on them, and that were their own first choice. As Kolko describes the situation:

¹²⁹ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 457.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 343.

However delayed its effects or the complexity of the reasons for them, World War Two radicalized a historically unprecedented fraction of Europe's and Asia's masses and mobilized them into leftist political parties as well as armed organizations. And what with the fragility of the traditional political and social elites, and the fatal compromises so many of them made with diverse forms of fascism and reaction, the Left emerged from the war not only far more powerful but, more important, with a degree of nationalist legitimacy that most of its conservative rivals could no longer claim. That so many revolutionary leaders ultimately became unimaginative functionaries who had no intention of disobeying Stalin's strictures is essentially irrelevant: very few people in 1945 understood the many ways in which the USSR had become a major source of stability in the world. More important, it was the Communist parties' and the Resistance armies' abilities to take power rather than their intentions or Moscow's inhibitions that struck anti-Communist politicians as the crucial challenge facing them.

In many nations, conservatives perceived their task as not merely to block change but to destroy entirely the capacity of those on the Left to defy them in any manner, whether parliamentary or violent...

It was the existence of such draconian constraints and the loss of freedom in a number of nations after 1945 that created the principal problem confronting the Left and altered the political landscape in ways that made it appear an armed threat. In a context in which Communist parties loyal to the Soviet line would willingly have acquiesced to be integrated into a peaceful political milieu had they been allowed to do so, the stages by which docile parties were transformed into nominally revolutionary ones... all engendered certain attributes: most important were the traditional ruling classes' elimination of the ability of Communist parties to continue along the essentially social democratic route that the USSR or their own inclinations preferred. In a word, conservative forces compelled leftists to act defensively or to face extinction, and what were described as revolutionary efforts in nations such as Greece and the Philippines actually began as unwilling and indecisive reactive responses on the part of hitherto unknown men and women.¹³⁵

And the communist parties in these countries were mass organizations, swollen by an influx of members who had joined the antifascist resistance during the war, from a background of diverse political traditions on the Left and in the labor movement — as well as previously apolitical people from the laboring classes with no real political tradition at all. These people were about as far from the Leninist ideal of disciplined, obedient cadres as can be imagined, and at times it was impossible for the old party leaderships to control many of their members; this was especially true when repressive measures by Allied-installed provisional governments or colonial regimes pushed them into defying Stalin's counsel of cooperation with the Western powers.¹³⁶

Starting in 1943, when the tide turned against the Axis and the Western Allies began to consider the problem of creating a postwar order in Europe, according to Kolko, the Allies were faced with the total discreditation of the prewar status quo and conservative elites, and the likelihood

¹³⁵ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 374–375.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

that a Resistance dominated by the Left would sweep into power following the collapse of the Axis occupation regimes.

The United States and Britain could see powerful Communist movements emerging throughout Western and Southern Europe and the central role of the Communists in the leadership of the armed Resistance. The Resistance attracted men and women who exhibited the courage and abandon of nationalist revolutionaries. They developed appropriate leftist ideologies, and might in time become social-revolutionary actors as well, to purge not only the foreign invaders but also those domestic forces of conservatism that had collaborated with fascism and made its victory so easy. Would the Resistance act, would the Communists take power? If historians have hardly examined the internal world of these movements in relation to global politics, it is also a fact that the American and British leaders at the time similarly failed to perceive them clearly and correctly, for there was seemingly no alternative but to prepare for the worst or face a possible effort to wrest from the West the political victory that was the objective of their military sacrifices and triumph.

Given the collapse of the prewar power of the social forces that had contained the Left after 1920, the question confronting the United States and Britain was how to fill the vacuum and what to do with the traditional parties of conservative order. Between 1943 and 1947 the Western Allies developed, at first haphazardly and then with deliberate consciousness, a coherent policy toward this dilemma....¹³⁷

As the Americans and British contemplated their return to Europe during 1943 and 1944 they also had to consider the problem of the political and social systems that might emerge within nations wracked by war. Everything they saw in this regard disturbed them, for throughout Western and southern Europe the political tides were blowing strongly toward the left and challenging the one unifying and fundamental premise both the Americans and English shared: anti-Communism....

...Other left parties in many nations were no less powerful, and were frequently more militant than the Communist party. During 1944–1945 the dominant current among the now radicalized prewar Social Democratic and Socialist parties was in favor of a United Front of all the Left to defeat fascism and build a new society, for the failure of the Left to collaborate more fully in the 1930's nearly led to its total physical demise before the onslaught of reaction. The Communists too accepted the concept of the United Front, making their political potential all the more credible and frightening in areas where democratic freedoms existed.

The role of the Communist parties in the Resistance posed immediate problems of physical security which could not wait for time or evolution.... Everywhere they looked the Americans and British saw political dangers on the left, and they had to prepare for the worst or else risk political defeat after their military triumphs.¹³⁸

The United States and Great Britain formulated Operation RANKIN primarily with such fears in mind. It was a plan against the contingency that Germany and its occupation regimes collapsed

¹³⁷ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp. 5–6.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–32.

before the OVERLORD invasion — in which case Anglo-American forces would invade the Continent in force, rapidly occupy France and the Rhineland, and land paratroops in Hamburg and Berlin.¹³⁹ As Harry Hopkins stated in March 1943: “It will, obviously, be a much simpler matter if the British and American armies are heavily in France or Germany at the time of the collapse.”¹⁴⁰

The West and the Division of the Postwar World

When the United States and Great Britain took possession of former Nazi-occupied territory, they became responsible for managing a population which had been politicized — and radicalized — to unprecedented levels.

Although when the war began people in most nations related to society and each other with intense personalism and lethargy, by 1945 a greater proportion of Europe’s population had become politicized than at any time in this century. This fundamental transformation of political attitudes and goals, this process of resocialization, became the essential precondition for the emergence of Resistance movements; but its significance far transcended it because it left a persistent legacy of political attitudes that by the end of the war, and then afterward, shaped European politics long after the Resistance disappeared in most nations as a potential armed threat to the existing political and class structures...

And given the class nature of the occupation regimes and the very different responses of social constituencies to the Nazi onslaught, it was also inevitable that... [the occupied population] should redefine their attitudes toward the dominant pre-war class — especially where it was so profoundly compromised as collaborators.¹⁴¹

...[I]t was precisely the social and class nature of various Resistance organizations, their political and ideological visions and the potential for civil and class conflict they implied, that made them so fraught with implications for the future of various European nations as well as the international power balance axiomatically linked to internal politics.¹⁴²

This resulted in “the emergence of the specter, to a degree otherwise unimaginable in 1939, of basic social transformation, even revolution, in the wake of resistance.” The ruling circles of the soon-to-be victorious Western Allies, from 1943 on, were confronted with the question of whether Europe would be swept by a wave of revolution comparable to that following WWI.¹⁴³ Specifically, thanks to the widespread discredit of social democrats for collaboration, and the

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 29–30, 33.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁴¹ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 240–241. In particular, virtually the entire French and Italian bourgeoisie were discredited as collaborators, along with a major part of that in Greece. *Ibid.*, p. 266.

(For that matter, Kolko later argues, the Soviet occupation authorities confronted essentially the same problem in Eastern Europe: “Although the dominant French Resistance was qualitatively different ideologically from the Polish, the fact remains that the very existence of the Resistance in both of these extreme cases posed identical political challenges to the specific members of the anti-Nazi alliance whose troops were scheduled to invade each of these states.” *Ibid.*, p. 248n.)

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 249.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

leading role of communists in the Resistance, Britain and the United States found themselves facing a Western European Left in which communist parties had an outsized influence.¹⁴⁴

...[A]fter 1943 the armies and police forces that had once protected conservative political structures were, if not defunct, at least greatly compromised and immeasurably weakened. For many potentially decisive weeks or even months, in large portions of Europe no credible armed force stood between an organized and often armed Resistance, one drawn mainly from and allied with the working class and poorer peasantry, and its conquest of political and administrative power.¹⁴⁵

In short, at the end of the war Great Britain and the United States were faced with the question of “the extent to which they could permit” the unprecedented radicalization and political mobilization of European populations “to define the war’s political aftermath and seize the fruits of their military victory from them.”¹⁴⁶

There being no indigenous repressive forces capable of containing the Left in former Axis territory, as the *Freikorps* and Mussolini had done after WWI, that role fell to the American and British occupiers themselves. And as Kolko notes, they were abetted by the USSR, which played a “stabilizing role” in preserving “the very existence of traditional capitalist social systems.”¹⁴⁷

As we saw above, Stalin was more than willing to discipline communists and rein in their radicalism in liberated territories under Soviet control, so long as he had some hope of an entente with the West. He did likewise with the communist parties of Western Europe. Seeing it as imperative “to assuage Anglo-American fears of an aggressive postwar communism,” Stalin pursued a policy of making the Western European parties “much less militant at a crucial point when most of their countless new adherents were being radicalized and were still far from disciplined.”¹⁴⁸

In Italy, there was considerable dissension between Britain and the United States over the nature of the provisional government. The British, considering themselves to have the paramount interest in Italy, claimed the right to play the dominant role in organizing the new government; FDR refused to concede this. But both Western Allies agreed that the Left should not be allowed to fill the gap left by the collapse of Mussolini’s regime and gradually retreating German occupation forces in the north; despite the publicly stated goal of “defascistization,” both British and American officers found it far easier in practice “to leave existing officeholders at their posts,” and the British (soon imitated by the Americans) used “the existing administrative system, including the police.” Only the socialists were strongly in favor of totally purging fascists from the administration, and even the Communist Party was “lukewarm” on the subject.¹⁴⁹

The primary dispute between the Western Allies concerned Churchill’s desire to establish a reactionary regime under King Victor Emmanuel III and Marshal Badoglio (a fascist collaborator until 1943), as the “sole barrier to ‘rampant Bolshevism.’”¹⁵⁰ Immediately following Roosevelt’s March 1944 demand that Badoglio be removed because of his unpopularity, Stalin came

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 302.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 293–294.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

to Churchill's aid by recognizing Badoglio's government; shortly thereafter the Communist Party announced its intent to participate in the government with no conditions.¹⁵¹

Occupation authorities banned electoral activity "during the period of military government," and the military authorities complied with Badoglio's request "to censor all criticism of the king, the government, and the army."¹⁵²

The basic premise of American occupational planning prior to the conquest of Italy was to maintain existing governmental structures, laws, and even official personnel so long as they did not conflict with military needs or ultimate political objectives.... First in Sicily, and then in Italy, the British and Americans increasingly relied on existing fascist institutions, and save in the most blatant cases, fascist personnel. The commanders disbanded fascist organizations themselves, but retained their useful institutions and personnel. Later, they promised, when military exigencies were less pressing, they would effect a more thorough purge.

The Badoglio government and the king also strongly opposed any serious dismissal of the fascists and spent most of their time purging the army of anti-monarchical elements. Predictably the Committee of National Liberation vigorously complained that the Badoglio government was carefully appointing ex-fascists to security and military posts. But such ex-fascists were politically reliable from the viewpoint of the military occupation, and after twenty years of organizational responsibility, very useful for military efficiency.¹⁵³

Italian antifascist forces and their base of public support were predictably dissatisfied with this arrangement. Badoglio and Victor Emmanuel

were universally regarded as remnants of the equally widely hated fascist order. From the moment they signed the "long surrender," until the end of the year, opposition to the Badoglio government grew in intensity as part of the sustained political crisis that characterized Italian politics for the next two years.¹⁵⁴

With the backing of Stalin and the Comintern, PCI leader Togliatti was able to enforce a non-revolutionary and cooperativist line over the objections of a much more radical rank and file. However, he did not purge the Party's mass membership of dissidents — a policy that left it ideologically quite diverse and laid the way for the future emergence of Eurocommunism.¹⁵⁵

When the Allies entered Rome in June 1944, the Committee of National Liberation refused to accept Badoglio as head of government. Churchill was furious, and — joined by Stalin — raised the issue of whether this was even legal under the terms of the surrender. But the new prime minister, Bonomi — former head of the Committee of National Liberation and a moderate constitutional monarchist — excluded Badoglio from the Cabinet, with the approval of the United States.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹⁵² Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 56.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵⁵ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 295.

¹⁵⁶ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 58.

Pietro Nenni's Socialist Party and the leftist Action Party both soon became disaffected from the Bonomi government over its lackadaisical approach to defascistization, although the Communist Party remained neutral. Meanwhile the United States finally and unambiguously won the competition for influence in Italy, as Bonomi developed closer ties with Roosevelt and expressed his desire to be integrated into Washington's vision of a postwar economic order.¹⁵⁷

When Allied forces reached Rome, leftist antifascist partisans got considerably harsher treatment than fascist military and police forces had received in the south.

To the Allied soldiers reaching the Rome region the experience was strange indeed. Armed Italians, often in red shirts, waving revolutionary banners, greeted them, frequently after they had set up their own local administrations. The Allied armies pushed some Partisans aside, and even threatened them with the firing squad; they arrested many and threw them into prisons. "The problem is a novel one and is bound to be met with in further intensity the further north the advance goes," one political officer reported in June, and whether these men were elected or not, Anglo-American officers decided, the Partisans would have to place themselves under occupation authority. The basic policy urged "tact and sympathy" but the Partisans were to surrender their arms; if possible, employment was to be found for former "patriots," as the military authorities preferred calling them. Indeed, the Occupation followed the carrot and stick policy, those Partisans refusing to hand in arms facing prison, those cooperating being given special food rations and, if available, jobs, though not usually in the army and rarely in the police. Unemployed, the Partisan was a "menace," armed a danger: "One thinks of the troubles of Yugoslavia and Greece in this connection," one regional commander observed to his colleagues.¹⁵⁸

The Western Allies also faced the problem of how to deal with CLNAI partisans in the north, which was considerably more complicated because they were more numerous, and were directly engaged in combat with German forces.

The problem of the Resistance, the Western leaders understood by the end of summer 1944, was not in controlling that small part of it liberated in the Rome area, but in reducing the potential danger that the very much larger groups still on Nazi-held territory posed.¹⁵⁹

The partisans had organized a strike wave in the industrial cities in late 1943, in summer 1944 were tying down a sizeable German combat force, and considered themselves the legitimate governing authority in the region.¹⁶⁰ The British and Americans greatly feared that, in the event the German occupation forces withdrew, leftist partisans would take over the northern cities before Anglo-American military forces could move in. While the Communist Party was willing to appease the Western Allies, the socialists threatened to create a socialist separatist regime in the north after German withdrawal — a position that contributed greatly to their popularity compared to the communists.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

¹⁶⁰ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 298–299.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 299.

Throughout the summer [the Allies] sharply reduced the quantity of arms dropped to the Resistance, which had never been substantial in the first place. For purely military reasons — the Resistance was tying down as many as fourteen Axis divisions at one time — the Anglo-American authorities renewed sending in a somewhat greater quantity at the end of September, but OSS agents in Partisan territory were able to have non-Communist Partisans receive first priority. Then, when the Allied military decided the Italian campaign had gone as far as it might for the winter and should not detract from the war in Western Europe, it was possible to regard the problem of the Resistance as mainly political. With constant references to Greece, Yugoslavia, and the threat of Bolshevism everywhere, the military authorities embarked on a Resistance policy that was both military and political in its dimensions.

On November 13, General Alexander, Supreme Allied Commander in the Mediterranean, broadcast a message to the Resistance urging them, in light of winter conditions, not to engage in large-scale military operations, to save their supplies and await orders, and restrict their activities to smaller operations. To the Germans it was a notice that the Allies would not initiate a winter campaign, freeing the Nazis for other tasks, including greater efforts in wiping out the Partisans. The Resistance was demoralized and significantly only the Communist leaders in the north attempted to paint the best possible face on Alexander's message. The Germans and fascists were now in a position to consolidate their power, and a widespread hunt resulted in an unprecedented elimination of Resistance leaders and members. Defections, death, and reprisals were everywhere.¹⁶²

Allen Dulles, Swiss director of the OSS, actually entered into clandestine negotiations with the Nazi occupation forces and secured their agreement not to surrender to the CLNAI, and to maintain essential services and law and order until they could surrender to arriving Anglo-American forces.¹⁶³

Despite this betrayal, German units disintegrated from low morale; armed workers took over the major northern cities and occupied the factories in April 1945, and then handed over control to the CLNAI. Ignoring the commands of communist leaders, partisans engaged in mass reprisals — including summary execution — of fascists.¹⁶⁴

The Bonomi government itself never directly addressed or resolved the status of the area under CLNAI political control, preferring to treat CLNAI as “the directing organization of the Resistance in the north.” The Socialist Party and Action Party, however, hoped to leave them in territorial control as “the basis of a reconstructed political order” centered on workers' councils.¹⁶⁵

Togliatti helped salvage the situation for the Allies by refusing to side with the Socialists, and insisting on national unity — thus sabotaging the ability of the CLNAI to pursue regional separatism on their own.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶² Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp. 61–62.

¹⁶³ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 300.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 300–301.

¹⁶⁵ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp. 62–63.

¹⁶⁶ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 299–300.

Finally, on December 7, the CLNAI signed an agreement — the Protocols of Rome — with humiliating terms:

In return for the promise of financial subsidies, food, clothing, and arms, the CLNAI agreed to subordinate itself to the Supreme Allied Commander, not to appoint a military head of the CLNAI unacceptable to him, to hand over power to the Allied military government upon its arrival in the north, and to follow the orders of the military government before and after liberation.... The Allies obtained assurances from the Resistance that it would not create a revolution.¹⁶⁷

When Allied forces reached areas of CLNAI control, they removed them from power, and revoked all decrees.¹⁶⁸

The pattern in Greece was largely the same as in Italy, with the National Liberation Front (EAM) — under pressure from both the communists and the Soviet Union — surrendering its gains to the British. The only difference was that, when pressed far enough, they eventually defied Stalin by fighting back.

The EAM, after virtually possessing most of Greece and besting the British forces in combat, willingly surrendered its arms and staked its future on the reliability of British promises and their small and anxious local allies. This abdication was possible only because the Communists in the EAM dictated it over a movement they could barely control.¹⁶⁹

But despite the Greek Communist Party (KKE) and the communist ELAS guerrillas going out of their way to appease the British — surrendering arms and staying outside Athens in accord with the Varkiza agreement — Churchill, following a long series of betrayals, packed the Greek army with prewar monarchists and wartime Nazi collaborators. The conservative government it installed, facing a reality in which the communists would likely come to power in an unfettered electoral system, ignored its own obligations to ELAS and the communists under Varkiza and resorted to an escalating series of repressive actions.¹⁷⁰ “The terror that ensued was ruthless, and ultimately self-defeating. It began immediately after the January 1945 truce and mounted in intensity.”

The regime systematically purged the army and political bureaucracy of pro-EAM elements. There was casual terror of random assassinations and beatings, and systematic repression by security committees and courts-martial that simply arrested EAM supporters and detained them without trial. The government tightly controlled trade unions, and charged former EAM underground government tax collectors with robbery and looting. The regime now judged ELAS executions of collaborators as murder. Outside the Athens area the government-proclaimed martial law lasted until August. The police and their supporters beat up EAM and Communists news-vendors, even arrested purchasers at random, and shot leftist reporters. Right-wing

¹⁶⁷ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁸ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 301.

¹⁶⁹ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 429.

¹⁷⁰ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 271–281.

bands roamed many districts, doling out retribution at will. When the British Parliamentary Legal Mission visited Greece at the end of the year they reported that wholesale terror filled the filthy, crowded jails with a very minimum of 50,000 prisoners, and by comparison the excellent, even comfortable, prisons for some of the worst fascists were comparatively empty.¹⁷¹

Yet as late as May 1945, Communist Party Secretary Nikos Zachariadis — newly returned from imprisonment in a Nazi concentration camp — attempted to purge the Party of militants and enforce continued cooperation with the British and the rightist regime.¹⁷² But despite pressure from Britain and from Stalin for the Communist Party to function in electoral politics as just another party, given the likelihood of communist victory in free elections the rightists in power felt they had no choice but to intensify the terror and repression.¹⁷³

The result, from mid-1946 on, was a growing civil war in which maintaining the government in power was beyond the resources of the British, and the United States assumed Britain's interest in Greece and saved the regime from collapse with U.S. funds and military advisors.¹⁷⁴

In France, the primary issue of contention between the Western Allies was whether to support the Vichy government, De Gaulle, or Darlan and Giraud (Vichy officials in Algeria who collaborated first with the Germans, and then with the Allies in 1942).¹⁷⁵ Germany tolerated the ultra-conservative Vichy regime and allowed it to administer France's overseas colonies. Meanwhile, in the period between the Fall of France and America's entry into the war, U.S. policy toward Vichy and its colonies caused considerable friction with the British (who were at "near war" with the Vichy regime). The Americans had an ambassador in Vichy and engaged in trade with French North Africa, administered by Vichy officials Admiral François Darlan and Gen. Maxime Weygand; in early 1941 they negotiated a trade agreement with Weygand. U.S. representatives in Vichy had positive impressions of both Petain and Darlan.

During mid-1941 the United States courted Weygand, not only because he wished to keep France from becoming a more active ally of Germany, which would have meant open war with Britain, but also as a possible future charismatic leader of Vichy and all France — and an alternative to the obviously rising star of Colonel Charles de Gaulle in London.¹⁷⁶

In 1942 the United States, preparing to enter the North African theater and doubtful of the allegiance the Anglophobe Darlan would choose, recruited Gen. Henri Giraud and

obtained his legitimation of the invasion as a foil to Darlan, should he refuse to cooperate. The Americans obtained Giraud's cooperation without consulting the English — in return for the promise that the invasion would involve only American troops, and would include southern France as well as North Africa. The United States chose

¹⁷¹ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp. 429–430.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 431.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 431–432.

¹⁷⁴ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 383; Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 435.

¹⁷⁵ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 64.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 64–65.

Giraud for the role, although he had no legal authority whatsoever, in order to create a political hero capable of offsetting the now ascendant figure of De Gaulle.¹⁷⁷

Although Darlan accepted the American invasion, he was nevertheless assassinated by a right-wing figure with obscure motives — at which point Giraud formally replaced him as governor of French North Africa. Darlan, despite his acquiescence, had considered his authority to derive from Petain and Vichy; Giraud, similarly, pursued “neofascist” internal policies with the backing of industrialists and bankers, his pro-American sympathies notwithstanding. Giraud’s antisemitic policies in North Africa, and his political repression of Gaullists, horrified Resistance forces throughout German-occupied Europe.¹⁷⁸

The essence of Giraud’s position might be stated as “Vichy without Germany.” Giraud was the leading spokesman for a group of conservative officers and industrialists who were both strong nationalists and opposed to the undisciplined politics of prewar France. They approved of Pétain’s “National Revolution,” with its idealization of the state and its chief, and Giraud publicly defended Pétain and Vichy but hoped they would also fight if Germany invaded Vichy France. Some of his important supporters were anti-Vichy, or more particularly anti-Darlan, but since the entire tendency was committed to a thoroughgoing Anglophobia they refused to cooperate with De Gaulle. Reactionary and antirepublican, Giraud naturally saw his regime in North Africa as a refinement and continuation of Vichy. He and his followers viewed international Communism as the great postwar danger after the desired defeat of Germany, and therefore they soon oriented themselves toward the United States. By being anti-British and anti-German, as well as opposed to the Left, Giraud was a most useful ally for the United States. But since he represented the traditional French Right, which had barely any future in 1943 even with American backing, it was not long before French conservatives considered De Gaulle, who also shared many of the ideological tenets of antirepublican nationalism, as a more viable opponent to the rising Left.

Giraud’s politics were well known to many of the Americans working with him, and they regarded him as a useful antidote both to the British-dominated De Gaulle and the Left.¹⁷⁹

Admiral Leahy, the former ambassador to Vichy, went so far as to argue for Petain as head of the provisional government after D-Day. De Gaulle was regarded as entirely too soft on the communist resistance.¹⁸⁰

Britain, in contrast, “wanted no political arrangements in North Africa which detracted from the authority of De Gaulle’s French National Committee in London.”¹⁸¹ In June 1943, Giraud and De Gaulle presented the United States with a *fait accompli*, together forming a French Committee of National Liberation which “assumed the powers and structure of a government-in-exile.”

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 68–69.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Meanwhile, De Gaulle himself “only regarded his agreement with Giraud as a starting point for replacing Vichy in North Africa altogether.” In July, he reorganized the Committee so as to reduce Giraud’s post to largely ceremonial status and concentrate power in his own hands.¹⁸²

The United States’ adamant opposition to De Gaulle, Kolko explains, reflected a power struggle with the British over their respective visions of the postwar world. British support for De Gaulle was in keeping with its goal of creating a Western European bloc under the leadership of Great Britain — a concept supported by the governments-in-exile of Norway, Belgium, and other countries — which would enable Britain to assume the status of an equal with the United States in the postwar order.¹⁸³

The Americans understood these implications, and therefore they hoped to stop De Gaulle’s rise to power. When John Foster Dulles was in London in July 1942 on a semi-official tour, he told Eden the Americans would not welcome a bloc of lesser states concentrated around a Great Power. “... the British wanted to build up France into a first class power, which would be on the British side,” Roosevelt observed on his way to Teheran in November 1943....¹⁸⁴

In France, unlike Italy, Britain’s preference ultimately won out and the provisional government wound up being headed by De Gaulle rather than by a Vichy neofascist as the United States desired. By the end of 1943 De Gaulle was clearly in ascendancy, and backing Giraud and other Vichyites against him was no longer a viable option. The United States accepted the inevitable, and switched its strategy to strengthening De Gaulle and the external Resistance forces he controlled — consisting primarily of nationalistic military officers — against the largely communist-dominated Resistance forces inside France.¹⁸⁵

By the eve of D-Day, the United States had become the primary supplier of arms to the internal Resistance, “though never in sufficient quantities to permit large, independent Resistance operations. And they never knowingly sent arms to urban and Communist-controlled groups.”¹⁸⁶

Although De Gaulle and the United States clashed on and off regarding the allocation of power between his proclaimed provisional government and the U.S. military authorities in France, the United States was at least confident of

his position on Communism. De Gaulle himself went to great pains to get this information across, for he appreciated that the Americans might be willing to put up with a great deal to have a charismatic leader who could save France from the Left. The Americans worried about the Communists’ being one of the parties of the CNL, and for this they criticized De Gaulle, but they had no doubts about the political safety of the man himself, save in relation to the British.

De Gaulle and his aides warned the Americans of the Soviet as well as the Communist menace from at least the spring of 1942 onward.... Murphy, one of the most sensitive Americans concerning Communism, reported to Hull in June 1943 that De Gaulle

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 73–74.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 75–76.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80–81.

told him “the French Communist Party had by its resistance to Germany gained an important place in France and he feared that unless a capable French administration is built up in time to control the Communist element there would be grave danger of widespread violence in France after liberation... in his opinion he felt he is qualified to control the French Communist Party.” The State Department received the same message from other observers as well, and it did not take them long to conclude that any relationship between De Gaulle and the Communist party would be strictly one of convenience and quite temporary.¹⁸⁷

Communist-led Resistance forces, under pressure from Stalin and from Communist Party leader Thorez to fight on behalf of unified national rather than class-based resistance, largely acquiesced both to Allied forces and to De Gaulle’s leadership.¹⁸⁸ The Communist Party participated in De Gaulle’s government. Indeed Thorez, after his return from exile in November 1944, “banned strikes, demanded more labor from the workers, and endorsed dissolution of the FFI [French Forces of the Interior resistance forces].”¹⁸⁹

As a participant in the government until May 1947, the Communist Party enthusiastically embraced the role of enforcing work-discipline on its membership, on behalf of De Gaulle. “Given their relationship to the working class, only they could extract the indispensable precondition for the restoration of the Old Order — production. The Communists became the party of production, even the party of the speedup.”¹⁹⁰

The situation confronting the Western Allies in East Asia and the Pacific was much the same as in Europe.

The surrender of Japan presented a monumental and complex set of problems for the Americans, for every place the Japanese conquered they shattered the Old Order of colonialism, or, as in the case of China, the tide of local Communist movements seemed irresistible. Everywhere in the Far East — China, Korea, the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies, Indochina — the necessity of fending off the Left and shoring up the stabilizing forces of the region appeared as a pressing task in the wake of the Japanese military collapse. Only Japan, firmly in the hands of the occupying forces, would emerge safely. Elsewhere the remnants of the Japanese army remained the last, thin barrier to the triumph of the anticolonialist Resistance movements, generally leftist in political identification.¹⁹¹

In Japan from 1944 on, a growing faction in the leadership saw mass radicalization and communist revolution, if it continued to fight an obviously unwinnable war, as a greater threat than whatever consequences might follow surrender. The U.S. Navy propagandized the leadership with subtle messaging that Japan would not be punished after the war, but that the United States would “renovate and incorporate” it into an American-led global capitalist economy. “Given the option of Bolshevism, the alternative was most attractive to the peace elements in and around the Japanese navy and industrial groups.” In May 1945 Harry Hopkins spoke to Stalin of “the desire of

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 86–87.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 94–95.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 600.

the Japanese industrial families to preserve their position and save Japan from destruction....”¹⁹² Together, these formed the elements of a postwar order in which Japan, under American hegemony, preserved much of the conservative prewar order.

Following the surrender, Japanese military forces and colonial administrators were immediately enlisted as proxies of the United States and Britain, in suppressing anti-fascist Resistance forces in areas still under Japanese occupation. Regarding all former Japanese-occupied territories, Truman’s August 14 General Order No. 1 “commanded the Japanese to aid and assist the Allied takeover in the precise manner MacArthur dictated, and above all not to surrender to unauthorized local armed Resistance groups.”¹⁹³

In Korea, the United States had planned to accept the surrender of Japanese forces as far north as possible in order to preclude Soviet forces occupying the entire peninsula when they declared war on Japan. And, with reasoning analogous to that behind Operation RANKIN in Western Europe, in late July 1945 the Joint Chiefs of Staff put readiness to occupy Pusan only second to Shanghai, against the contingency of sudden and unexpectedly early Japanese surrender. General Order No. 1 clarified the matter by instructing Japanese forces in Korea to surrender to the United States south of the 38th parallel, and to the Soviet Union north of that.

The American takeover of Korea vividly illustrated the principle of General Order Number 1 that the Japanese were to transfer power directly from their hands to authorized occupation forces, and until then prevent the local Left from intervening. On August 28 the Japanese commander in Korea wired MacArthur that “Communists and independence agitators are plotting to take advantage of the situation to disturb peace and order.” Since Washington was opposed to both, the American replied immediately that “It is directed that you maintain order and preserve the machinery of government in Korea south of the 38th degree ... until my forces assume those responsibilities...” Shortly thereafter the Koreans were told by American leaflets to respect the orders of the existing government—the Japanese—and not to participate in demonstrations of any sort, including those demanding immediate Korean independence.¹⁹⁴

In the Philippines, President Quezon went into exile at the time of the Japanese invasion but instructed the cabinet and other government officials to remain. The American authorities told them to remain in their posts and obey all orders from the Japanese, but refuse to swear allegiance to Japan. The United States intended to resume ruling the island through traditional elites once the war was over, and did not want to leave a vacuum in the interim which might be filled by unknown and untested resistance forces.

For the islands’ traditional rulers to resist — and they were overwhelmingly unwilling to embark on that course — would only have led to the destruction of many of them and the likely domination of strongly anti-American nationalists over much of the nation or a dangerous power vacuum at the war’s end.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 550–552.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 601.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 603.

¹⁹⁵ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 352–353.

Nevertheless, owing to economic hardships under Japanese rule and the corruption of local elites, resistance forces did arise. They ranged from spontaneous peasant actions — denounced as “extreme leftist actions” by the communists — against quasi-feudal landed classes, to more apolitical guerrillas who “resembled warlord armies far more than the patriotic resistance forces they usually purported to be.” In practice, these latter forces — most of them on the main island of Luzon — proved to be next to worthless for anti-Japanese resistance, but crucial for “containing the only political guerrilla movement that existed, the Hukbalahap.”¹⁹⁶

Despite the Communist Party’s significant presence in the Huks, it by no means exerted complete control. Although the Huks were founded in March 1942 at the Communist Party’s behest, many of their founding leaders had a background in previous armed peasant resistance groups, and had engaged in the sort of activities denounced as left-wing extremism by the communists. They tended to pursue their own agendas locally, largely in disregard of the mostly urban and educated Communist Party leadership and their agenda (which, in keeping with Comintern policy, called for a united front of all patriotic forces and loyalty to the United States).¹⁹⁷ In particular, the Huks disregarded PKP instructions to confiscate only the crops of collaborationist landlords, and to share power locally with landlords rather than directly controlling villages in their own name.¹⁹⁸

In late 1944, as MacArthur’s forces entered the Philippines, the Huks launched all-out attacks on the Japanese and established people’s councils in numerous towns. Three provinces elected or appointed governors from the PKP.¹⁹⁹ “By the beginning of 1945 all that stood between the Huks and a total transformation of the agrarian economy was the United States military, led by MacArthur.”²⁰⁰

MacArthur’s first order of business was to disarm the Huks, with the help of the previously mentioned apolitical warlord “resistance” which the Americans had “kept... in reserve mainly for this function.”²⁰¹ The American occupation forces restored native elites to power and, aside from a very few symbolic cases, refrained from any sanctions against Japanese collaborationists.²⁰²

MacArthur released Manuel Roxas, imprisoned for collaboration, and installed him as president of the newly independent Philippine nation. He and his successors conducted an ongoing war of counterinsurgency, on behalf of the rural landlords, against the Huks.²⁰³

America’s willingness to ignore local elites’ collaboration with the Japanese, and to install them as the governing class, was in considerable part dictated by their desire for military and naval bases in the Philippines.

What the American government wanted, therefore, only the conservative comprador elements, the very groups collaborating with the Japanese, were likely to grant. For this reason, despite the certainty that the Filipino people as a whole were bitterly anticollaborationist, the official American policy viewed the collaborationists with

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 356–357.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 360.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

²⁰⁰ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 606.

²⁰¹ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 362.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 363–364.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 386–394.

silent toleration, and many believed that prewar President Manuel Quezon, or even Sergio Osmeña in Washington, were not themselves unfriendly toward them.

Vindication of this suspicion came at the end of November 1944, when Osmeña landed on Leyte with MacArthur and immediately issued a statement exonerating those public officials who “had to remain at their posts to maintain a semblance of government, to protect the population from the oppressor to the extent possible by human ingenuity and to comfort the people in their misery.” The counterrevolution that followed in the wake of the American occupation laid the basis for a civil war that soon followed....²⁰⁴

In Indochina, the British favored a restoration of French colonial rule. The Americans initially preferred a long-term trusteeship (lasting “two or three decades”) by some combination of the victorious powers, both to punish the French for their collaboration and to rein in De Gaulle. The British in February 1944 proposed the reoccupation of Indochina with French troops, “presumably without prejudicing the final disposition of the country”; despite a consensus in the State and War Departments in favor of this, Roosevelt refused to approve it. Although FDR once again rejected this proposal when the British resubmitted it in August, they nevertheless included a French mission under Mountbatten’s Southeast Asia Command. At the same time, Roosevelt sent mixed signals by refusing a proposal to arm anti-Japanese rebels because they might also use their weapons against the French. FDR continued to reject proposals for French restoration, and renewed his proposal for a multi-power trusteeship at Yalta.²⁰⁵

Meanwhile the Japanese, until March 1945, continued to rule Indochina through the Vichy French administration. But in March they replaced it with a Japanese puppet government under the emperor Bao Dai.²⁰⁶

It was around this time that Ho Chi Minh and the Vietminh began active resistance to both the Japanese and the French. In July the Vietminh program, which they forwarded to Washington, demanded independence and the expropriation of French property; this was followed by the declaration of an independent republic in August.²⁰⁷

The United States dealt with this immediate threat of a leftist regime in Indochina by authorizing, both at Potsdam and in General Order No. 1, the British occupation of Vietnam south of the 16th parallel — which would obviously entail British restoration of French rule — and Chinese occupation north of it.²⁰⁸

From this point on, the United States was in the position of sporting restored French rule in Indochina.

Given the alternative, American support for the restoration of France to Indochina was a logical step toward stopping the triumph of the Left everywhere. Both in action and policy the American government now chose to gamble on the reimposition of French colonialism, as disagreeable as they once may have thought it to be. By mid-August, French officials were hinting that French restoration would fully open the

²⁰⁴ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 605.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 607–608.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 609.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 609.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 609.

Indochinese economy to the United States and England. At the end of the month, De Gaulle was in Washington, and on August 24 the conversation with Truman turned to Indochina. The United States, the President now told De Gaulle, favored the return of France to Indochina. He had made the final pledge to France, and it would shape the course of world history for decades.²⁰⁹

The United States and the Third World

We already saw, above, the implications of U.S. wartime planning for control over the Third World in the postwar order. It remains to consider the practical implementation of those plans.

The U.S. policy vision concerning the colonial world, in particular — what was to become the postcolonial or Third World — was a continuation of the Grand Area approach. Samuel P. Huntington described the “dominant feature” of the postwar period as “the extension of American power into the vacuums that were left after the decline of the European influence in Asia, Africa, and even Latin America.”

The shift in U.S.-European power relations was legitimated by the common need to prevent Soviet or Chinese influence from replacing European influence. Americans devoted much attention to the expansion of Communism (which, in fact, expanded very little after 1949), and in the process they tended to ignore the expansion of the United States’ influence and pressure throughout much of the world....²¹⁰

Although U.S. intervention in the Third World is commonly framed as driven by anticommunism — and that framing has no doubt been internalized by American policy elites along with the rest of their legitimizing ideology — the truth is quite different. The central aims of American Third World policy have been exactly what they would have been had the Cold War never happened, or the Soviet Union never existed: to guarantee access to cheap raw materials on American terms, to integrate Third World countries into a global division of labor in which their own function is the export of raw materials, and to keep their markets open — by force if necessary — to Western industrial exports.

As evidence that anticommunism was not the primary American motivation in the Third World, Kolko argues that “[w]hile there were many varieties of capitalism consistent with the anti-Communist politics the United States... sought to advance,”

what was axiomatic in the American credo was that the form of capitalism it advocated for the world was to be integrated in such a way that *its* businessmen played an essential part in it. Time and again it was ready to sacrifice the most effective way of opposing Communism in order to advance its own national interests. In this vital sense its world world role was not simply one of resisting the left but primarily of imposing its own domination.²¹¹

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 610.

²¹⁰ Samuel P. Huntington, “Political Development and the Decline of the American System of World Order,” *Daedalus* 96:3 (Summer 1967), pp. 926–927.

²¹¹ Gabriel Kolko, *Confronting the Third World: United States Foreign Policy 1945–1980* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), p. 117.

...[I]t was its clash with nationalist elements, as diverse as they were, that revealed most about the U.S. global crusade, for had communism alone been the motivation of its behavior, the number of obstacles to its goals the United States confronted in the Third World would have been immeasurably smaller.²¹²

American backing for even the most corrupt and authoritarian elites was not, contrary to the apologetic narrative, undertaken for the sole purpose of strategic defense against the communist menace.

The U.S. dilemma in the increasingly unstable Third World was due largely to its refusal to accept willingly the nationalist movements and doctrines sweeping the less-developed nations. Indeed, it was the very absence of a significant Communist role in most of the Third World that revealed the growing importance of structural alterations crucial to the U.S. and the conservative role it played to safeguard its principally economic interests.²¹³

...[America's] vital interests... goaded it to attempt to control changes in the Third World. By the decade of the 1950s the U.S. was importing 48 percent of its total supply of metals, compared to 5 percent in the 1920s, and the very health of its economy now depended on crucial supplies from the Third World.²¹⁴

In other words, its motives were a direct continuation of the "Open Door Imperialism" and "Grand Area" policies that previously led to American intervention in WWII.

The primary Soviet threat, to the extent it existed, resulted from their role as a spoiler, interfering with American efforts to maintain their supremacy in the Third World, and from the role of their strategic power as a deterrent to direct U.S. military intervention on the scale it would otherwise have taken in the absence of the superpower dimension. To quote Chomsky yet again, "the reality... is that the fear of potential superpower conflict has served to contain and deter the United States and its far more ambitious global designs."²¹⁵

Western analysts, including some of the most anti-communist variety, admitted as much. For example, late in the Cold War Dimitri K. Simes gloated that the removal of the threat of Soviet counteraction as a deterrent against U.S. aggression allowed "greater latitude for unilateral uses of America's power against those who consider its interests easy prey." Simes went on to make it clear that those "interests" were primarily economic.

["Moscow's current sense of overextension"] puts America in a stronger bargaining position vis-a-vis defiant third world debtors.

Paradoxically, the Soviet-American rapprochement makes military power more useful as a United States foreign policy instrument....

Those who contemplated challenging important American interests might think twice if America's hands were relatively untied. For example, the 1973 oil embargo probably would not have taken place without the Arabs' widespread perception

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²¹³ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 417.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 418.

²¹⁵ Chomsky, *Deterring Democracy*, p. 60.

that America would not dare to respond military out of fear of triggering Soviet counter-intervention.

Then, too, the Sandinistas and their Cuban sponsors would bound [sic] to become a little more nervous over Mr. Gorbachev's potential reaction if America finally lost patience with their mischief.²¹⁶

On the other hand, the "Soviet threat" also served as a convenient legitimizing tool for policies the United States would have taken in any case, but perhaps with greater difficulties in obtaining public support. As Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwarz argued, "for this country's foreign policy leadership, the requirements of containment fortuitously coincided with those of the world order strategy that would have been pursued even without a Soviet threat."²¹⁷

That's not to say that the American pretense of defending the "Free World" against "International Communism" was just a cynical ploy to justify defending capitalist extractive interests. It's more likely that, seeing the world through their own ideological filters, the American leadership genuinely equated any national threat to the neocolonial economic order with "communist aggression."

Privately and publicly, America's leaders nonetheless attributed to the Russians a transcendent ability to cause, exploit, or shape events in even the most remote countries. They condemned "extreme nationalism" as an objective Communist tool, in spite of the fact that its leading proponents were often the most conservative Latin American or Asian bourgeoisie who advocated it to advance industrialization behind protectionist walls, just as the U.S. had done after 1861.²¹⁸

In reality, Third World hegemony was America's primary interest throughout the postwar period. And the greatest perceived threats to this hegemony were, first, the pursuit of policies like import substitution, economic diversification, control over the terms of foreign resource extraction, and other departures from the export-oriented development model; and, second, the demonstration effect of successfully carrying out such policies.

For example, National Security Council document NSC 5432, "U.S. Policy Toward Latin America" (18 Aug 1954) stated the primary U.S. policy goal as to guarantee "[a]dequate... access by the United States to raw materials essential to U.S. security," and to guard against "domestic pressures" in the post-colonial world to "increase production *and to diversify their economies*" (emphasis added). The means of accomplishing this would be to "[f]oster closer relations between Latin American and U.S. military personnel in order to increase the understanding of, and orientation toward, U.S. objectives..., recognizing that the military establishments... play an influential role in government."²¹⁹

A study group of the Woodrow Wilson Center, in a 1955 report, pointed to the threat of "a serious reduction in the potential resource base and market opportunities of the West owing to

²¹⁶ Dimitri K. Simes, "If the Cold War Is Over, Then What?" *New York Times*, December 27, 1988, p. A21.

²¹⁷ Christopher Layne and Benjamin Schwarz, "American Hegemony Without an Enemy," *Foreign Policy* 92 (Fall 1993), p. 20.

²¹⁸ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 417.

²¹⁹ Noam Chomsky, *On Power and Ideology: The Managua Lectures* (Boston: South End Press, 1987), pp. 20–21.

the subtraction of the communist areas and their economic transformation in ways that reduce their willingness and ability to complement the industrial economies of the West.”²²⁰

And the August 1962 NSC document “U.S. Overseas Defense Policy” asserted the right to intervene militarily in defense of purely economic interests. It was vital that “developing nations evolve in a way that affords a congenial world environment.” This not only required preventing their “manpower and national resources” from falling under “communist control,” but guaranteeing the U.S. “economic interest that the resources and markets of the less developed world remain available to us and to other Free World countries.”²²¹

As an example of U.S. fears of the demonstration effect of independent models of development, a State Department official in 1954 warned of the appeal of Arbenz’s land reform in Guatemala.

Guatemala has become an increasing threat to the stability of Honduras and El Salvador. Its agrarian reform is a powerful propaganda weapon; its broad social program of aiding the workers and peasants in a victorious struggle against the upper classes and large foreign enterprises has a strong appeal to the population of Central American neighbors where similar conditions prevail.²²²

The last years of World War II and the first years of the postwar era saw the rapid assembly of an institutional framework for global economic governance, and the exertion of political and military power by the United States and its allies over the Third World.

In the financial sphere, the World Bank and foreign aid both played central roles in integrating Third World countries into a global economic system controlled by the United States and its junior partners. Their primary purpose was to facilitate the export of capital. The World Bank was created to “promote private foreign investment by means of guarantees or participation in loans and other investments made by private investors,” and to make direct loans to build infrastructure necessary to later private investment.²²³

The World Bank subsidized American capital export, in particular, by promoting Third World infrastructure. According to Kolko, almost two-thirds of its loans went to the transportation and power infrastructure which American business needed to support local investment.²²⁴ A laudatory 1982 Treasury Department report referred to such infrastructure projects (comprising some 48% of lending in FY 1980) as “externalities” — i.e. subsidies — to business. It spoke glowingly of the economic benefits — especially in promoting the shift to export-oriented, cash crop agriculture.

Physical infrastructure projects, particularly improvements in internal transportation and communications systems, often yield high external economies in the form of lower costs of production, distribution, and/or marketing in a wide range of industries. [Multilateral development bank] projects in the transportation sector, for

²²⁰ William Yandell Elliot, ed., *The Political Economy of American Foreign Policy* (Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1955), p. 42.

²²¹ Kolko, *Confronting the Third World*, p. 130.

²²² Burrows to (Secretary of State for Latin America) John Moors Cabot, December 23, 1953, NA Lot 57 D95 Box 5, quoted in Piero Gleijeses, *Shattered Hope: The Guatemalan Revolution and the United States, 1944–1954* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), p. 365.

²²³ Kolko, *The Politics of War*, p. 257.

²²⁴ Kolko, *Confronting the Third World*, p. 120.

example, can make economically attractive the cultivation of more fertile but formerly isolated land, increase the mobility and efficiency of the labor force, and often induce a shift from subsistence to commercial farming leading to a higher volume of output.²²⁵

(Translated into English, this means that subsidizing shipping costs encourages rich landlords to evict tenants, in collusion with international capital, in order to consolidate their holdings for cash crop export agriculture.)

A great deal of such infrastructure is so situated as to facilitate the removal of wealth from host countries; the investments supported by multilateral financial institutions, Kolko argued, were “unusually parasitic,”

not merely in the manner in which they use a minimum amount of dollars to mobilize maximum foreign resources, but also because of the United States’ crucial position in the world raw-materials force structure both as consumer and exporter. This is especially true in the developing regions, where extractive industries and cheap labor result in the smallest permanent foreign contributions to national wealth.²²⁶

The infrastructure loans not only subsidize the export of capital, but the need to repay them locks Third World countries into economic models based on the export of raw materials.

First, most of the loans go to build an internal infrastructure which is a vital prerequisite for the development of resources and direct United States private investments. Then there is the fact that to repay loans in dollars requires the borrowing nations to export goods capable of earning them, which is to say, raw materials....²²⁷

Development banks are an excellent weapon for compelling favorable policies in Third World countries. Infrastructure aid, under Truman’s “Point Four” program, was conditioned on recipient countries giving equal domestic treatment to U.S. firms.²²⁸ And balance of payments support loans, in the words of the Treasury Department, “encourage countries to adopt open trading policies involving the promotion of export industries and the reduction of tariff barriers which foster uncompetitive import substitution.”²²⁹ This refers to the practice of structural adjustment loans, or standby loans, adopted by the multilateral agencies in the 1960s, ostensibly as debtor relief, but really to rescue banks owning risky debt in Third World countries. In return for loans to meet interest payments, the countries must adopt “reforms” like removing restrictions on foreign investment, increasing the export orientation of the economy, reducing wages, deregulation to cut costs in export industry, and reducing import substitution programs. Although such programs initially affected relatively few countries, the debt crisis of the early 80s brought large numbers of debtor nations under their provisions.²³⁰

²²⁵ “United States Participation in the Multilateral Development Banks in the 1980s,” Department of the Treasury, Washington, DC, 1982, p. 9.

²²⁶ Gabriel Kolko, *The Roots of American Foreign Policy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 75.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

²²⁸ Kolko, *Confronting the Third World*, pp. 42–43.

²²⁹ “United States Participation in the Multilateral Development Banks in the 1980s,” p. 10.

²³⁰ Walden Bello, “Structural Adjustment Programs: ‘Success’ for Whom?” in Jerry Mander and Edward Goldsmith, eds., *The Case Against the Global Economy* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), pp. 285–287.

Cheryl Payer compares debt dependency favorably to peonage as a system for maintaining control.

The system [of using debts to “help... keep the potentially rebellious borrower in line”] can be compared point by point with peonage on an individual scale.... The aim of the employer/creditor/merchant is neither to collect the debt once and for all, not to starve the employee to death, but rather to keep the labourer permanently indentured through his debt to his employer.²³¹

“Economic Hit Man” John Perkins describes it in similar terms. His job was to “justify huge international loans that would funnel money” to U.S. companies like Bechtel, Halliburton, Stone & Webster, and Brown & Root, “through massive engineering and construction projects.” At the same time, he would “work to bankrupt the countries that received those loans (after they had paid... U.S. contractors, of course) so that they would be forever beholden to their creditors, and so they would present easy targets when we needed favors, including military bases, UN votes, or access to oil and other natural resources.”

The unspoken aspect of every one of these projects was that they were intended to create large profits for the contractors, and to make a handful of wealthy and influential families in the receiving countries very happy, while assuring the long-term financial dependence and therefore the political loyalty of governments around the world. The larger the loan, the better. The fact that the debt burden placed on a country would deprive its poorest citizens of health, education, and other social services for decades to come was not taken into consideration.²³²

Ideally, as Holly Sklar points out, the corporate ruling class prefers the “more insidious style” of debt diplomacy (she gives the example of the IMF breaking Michael Manley’s democratic socialist program in Jamaica) to more naked use of force on the pattern of the “Chilean coup scenario.”²³³ But at an intermediate level, the United States also has intelligence resources for fairly low-key covert action, and for assistance to counterinsurgency campaigns by friendly juntas. The national security community’s capability for low-level intervention, interacting synergistically with the carrot and stick of debt diplomacy, serves admirably in allowing the U.S. to replace unfriendly regimes without the political risk associated with direct military intervention. Cheryl Payer’s *The Debt Trap* is an excellent survey of the use of debt crises to force countries into standby arrangements, precipitate coups, or provoke military crackdowns. She provides case studies of the Suharto coup, the overthrow of Goulart in Brazil, the Pinochet coup, and Marcos’ declaration of martial law.²³⁴ Walden Bello’s *The Development Debacle* is a more in-depth case study of the Philippines, based on extensive documentation of World Bank collaboration with Marcos in his authoritarian crackdown, giving him a free hand in imposing an austerity program politically impossible against a background of free elections.²³⁵

²³¹ Cheryl Payer, *The Debt Trap: The International Monetary Fund and the Third World* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), pp. 48–49.

²³² John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2004), pp. 15–16.

²³³ Holly Sklar, “Overview,” in Sklar, ed., *Trilateralism: The Trilateral Commission and Elite Planning for World Management*, p. 29.

²³⁴ Payer, *The Debt Trap*.

²³⁵ Walden Bello, *Development Debacle: The World Bank in the Philippines* (Oakland: Institute for Food and Development Policy, 1982).

One colorful example of the use of economic weapons against a rebellious vassal can be found in the Nixon administration's discussions of Chile. The goal, in Nixon's words, was to "make the [Chilean] economy scream" with a total financial and economic embargo, coupled with the exploitation of friendly ties to the military. As Ambassador Edward Korry warned the Chileans, "Not a nut or bolt shall reach Chile under Allende. Once Allende comes to power we shall do all within our power to condemn Chile and all Chileans to utmost deprivation and poverty."²³⁶

As the Chilean example suggests, U.S. ties and military assistance to foreign military forces can be quite effective, when brought to bear in combination with economic warfare. The objectives of military assistance become clear when we see against whom it is directed. Miles Wolpin, in *Military Aid and Counterrevolution in the Third World*, provides a list of the "military or executive depictions of political targets" of the Military Assistance Program," based on a systematic review of Congressional hearings on the program: neutralism, leftist revolution, forces of disruption, nationalism, radical African states, home-grown insurgents, insurgencies inimical to U.S. interests, political instability, extremist elements, political dissidents, insurgents and their allies, other extremists, radical elements, militant radicals, revolution, Arab nationalism, revolutionary ideas, leftist, ultranationalist, anti-American, Nasser-type.²³⁷ And Methodists!

Government circles repeatedly made clear that the main purpose of the military assistance program was to secure internal political and economic orientations favorable to U.S. interests, not to assist in external defense. The NSC paper "Overseas Internal Defense Policy" (August 1962), for example, stated:

A change brought about through force by non-communist elements may be preferable to prolonged deterioration of governmental effectiveness.... It is U.S. policy, when it is in the U.S. interest, to make the local military and police advocates of democracy and agents for carrying forward the development process.²³⁸

In Congressional hearings on foreign assistance to Indonesia and Laos in the 1960s, spokesmen for the military assistance program drew a "*clear distinction*" between building up or cultivating the friendship of an army, on one hand, and supporting that army's government."²³⁹ In a colloquy with Representative Fraser in 1971, Undersecretary of Defense for International Security Affairs Nutter emphasized the importance of military assistance in establishing ties with Third World military leaders, as a means of influencing internal events — sometimes by the deliberate destabilization of unfriendly regimes.

Mr. Fraser. In some of these countries, we are providing assistance to the side that has seized the power.

Secretary Nutter.... We feel it is extremely important to maintain our relations with the people who are in positions of influence in those countries so we can help influence the course of events....

Mr. Fraser. In your judgment, [national security of the United States] means internal stability in those countries, is that right?

²³⁶ Holly Sklar, "Overview," pp. 28–29.

²³⁷ Miles Wolpin, *Military Aid and Counterrevolution in the Third World* (Toronto and London: Lexington Books, 1972), p. 19

²³⁸ Kolko, *Confronting the Third World*, p. 133.

²³⁹ Wolpin, *Military Aid and Counterrevolution in the Third World*, p. 20.

Secretary Nutter. Not always. Sometimes it does, sometimes it does not. It means maintaining our influence in some areas of the world that are critical to our security. It means helping to promote, as best we can, the developments that are most in our national interest, but that does not necessarily mean providing for the internal security of those countries. Sometimes it does.²⁴⁰

The policy community and its associated policy intellectuals also indicated that “national security” had more to do with U.S. economic control over resources and markets than with military defense against external attack. Hilton P. Goss, a “Defense Department associated scholar,” wrote in a 1958 study on Africa:

The potential resources of Africa are needed on the side of the free world to aid in the preservation of U.S. security.... A U.S. policy for Africa and the Africans must be designed and implemented promptly or we shall lose Africa — to obstructive nationalism, to the communists, or to a polarization on a basis of colored vs. white peoples of the world.²⁴¹

In 1968, General Robert Porter, Commander-in-Chief of the Southern Command, described the Military Assistance Program as an insurance policy for private investment in Latin America. In an address to the Pan-American Society in New York, he said:

As a final thought, consider the small amount of U.S. public funds that have gone for military assistance... as a very modest insurance policy protecting our vast private investment in an area of tremendous trade and strategic value to our country.²⁴²

None of this is to say, by any means, that United States policymakers like unnecessary resorts to military coups or death squad regimes. The general progression of methods generally goes from the use of financial and economic power, to covert aid to destabilization or repression, and only to outright military force as the weapon of last resort. As John Perkins put it:

In countries like Ecuador, Nigeria, and Indonesia, we dress like local schoolteachers and shop owners. In Washington and Paris, we look like government bureaucrats and bankers. We appear humble, normal. We visit project sites and stroll through impoverished villages. We profess altruism, talk with local papers about the wonderful humanitarian things we are doing. We cover the conference tables of government committees with our spreadsheets and financial projections, and we lecture at the Harvard Business School about the miracles of macroeconomics. We are on the record, in the open. Or so we portray ourselves and so are we accepted. It is how the system works. We seldom resort to anything illegal because the system itself is built on subterfuge, and the system is by definition legitimate.

However — and this is a very large caveat — if we fail, an even more sinister breed steps in, ones we [economic hit men] refer to as the jackals, men who trace their

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 17–18.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

heritage directly to those earlier empires. The jackals are always there, lurking in the shadows. When they emerge, heads of state are overthrown or die in violent “accidents.” And if by chance the jackals fail, as they failed in Afghanistan and Iraq, then the old models resurface. When the jackals fail, young Americans are sent in to kill and to die.²⁴³

Although policy elites are willing to resort to violence when softer methods fail, whenever possible they prefer spectator democracies in which the range of public choices is carefully managed to exclude anything touching on the real structure of economic power. According to Terry Karl, U.S. involvement in Latin America has been guided by the ideology of electoralism, which asserts that “merely holding elections will channel political action into peaceful contests among elites and accord public legitimacy to the winners...”²⁴⁴

For example, Thomas Carothers explained that democracy policy in El Salvador did not touch the “major power structures in Salvadoran society — principally the military and the economic elite,” which were “antidemocratic.” The United States “had no real conception of democracy,” in which “the military was not the dominant actor, the economic elite no longer held the national economy in its hand, the left was incorporated into the political system, and all Salvadorans had both the formal and substantive possibility of political participation.”²⁴⁵ Honduran policy, likewise, “greatly strengthened the antidemocratic military, [and] reified a formal electoral process that did little to change the antidemocratic structural features of the society.”²⁴⁶

U.S. Central American policy was based on the belief that “a country is a democracy when it has a government that came to power through free and fair elections.” This belief “ignores the issue of how much real authority [an] elected government has” vis-a-vis economic and military power sectors, and ignores the vital dimension of popular participation, “including the free expression of opinions, day-to-day interaction between the government and the citizenry, the mobilization of interest groups,” and the like.²⁴⁷ “[T]he impulse is to promote democratic change but the underlying objective is to maintain the basic order of what... are quite undemocratic societies.” Democracy is a means of “relieving pressure for more radical change,” but only through “limited, top-down forms of democratic change that did not risk upsetting the traditional structure of power with which the United States has long been allied.”²⁴⁸

The goal of all these methods, taken together, was to make American hegemony as cost-effective and politically sustainable as possible. After its direct intervention in Korea, the United States tried to minimize costs to itself by relying on an imperial strategy of indirect rule through Third World local elites — which committed it, in turn, to keeping those elites in power.

The U.S. after Korea believed that it might... avoid the massive employment of its own troops again in Third World contexts by relying upon friendly leaders and their

²⁴³ Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, xx-xxi.

²⁴⁴ Quoted by Paul Drake, “From Good Men to Good Neighbors: 1912–1932,” in Abraham F. Lowenthal, ed., *Exporting Democracy: The United States and Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), p. 6.

²⁴⁵ Thomas Carothers, “The Reagan Years: The 1980s,” in Abraham F. Lowenthal, ed., *Exporting Democracy*, pp. 96, 97.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

armies to cope with local rebellions (many of them radical but not necessarily Leninist), aiding them with equipment, training, and funds and turning them into proxies of American power.

Annual military aid in the form of equipment, advisers, and training to nations in Latin America and Asia quadrupled under Eisenhower...., and the creation of integrative regional alliances — SEATO and CENTO to begin with — further tied Washington’s destiny, and credibility, to that of its proxies. Reliance on the military as the most promising single power group in Third World nations became official policy, although this did not preclude support for other tyrants. Augmenting this dependence on officers was the United States’ systematic efforts to improve the ability of local police departments to perform political functions. “Public safety” missions, and equipment, were sent to thirty-eight countries over a seven-year period, and many people were brought from those states to undergo training in the U.S. Even more important was the great expansion of the CIA’s covert activities, a supremely flexible mechanism that allowed the U.S. both to intervene in countless ways in innumerable countries and to deny responsibility in case of embarrassment or failure.... The CIA could attempt virtually anything with impunity, and often did with great success, as in Iran in 1953 and Guatemala in 1954, giving Washington “unconventional” means to become enmeshed, for better or worse, in many more nations.²⁴⁹

This has been an outline of the institutional structure and general characteristics of U.S. domination of the Third World in the postwar period. I lack the space to catalog all the specific examples of U.S. invasions, sponsorship of coups, training and funding of death squads, and the like; to do so would require an entire book of its own. Just listing the major examples — the overthrow of Arbenz and Mossadegh, backing for Diem’s Saigon regime, the overthrow of Sukarno, the assassination of Lumumba and backing of Mobutu, the overthrow of Goulart, the Vietnam counterinsurgency, Operation Condor, the Pinochet coup, the Contras and Salvadoran death squads, aid to the Mujaheddin — takes long enough. Besides, there already is a book recounting, case by case and with heavy documentation, the American record of intervention for the entire postwar period through the 1990s: *Killing Hope*, by William Blum.²⁵⁰

The End

By definition, a condominium requires two parties. The sudden and unexpected implosion of the Soviet bloc and then the Soviet Union itself, in two years’ time, therefore concludes the period under consideration. The rest of the Soviet Party leadership, and the leadership of the military and KGB, Vladislav Zubok writes, were blindsided by Gorbachev’s willingness to dismantle the Soviet Union’s Eastern European sphere of control and even Communist Party rule in the Soviet Union itself.

The most formidable of the conservative strongholds, the KGB, still believed in early 1987 that Gorbachev was implementing Andropov’s program of controlled conserva-

²⁴⁹ Kolko, *Century of War*, pp. 415–416.

²⁵⁰ William Blum. *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II* (Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995).

tive modernization and imperial retrenchment. It did not occur to the KGB leadership that Gorbachev intended to dismantle the entire regime of police repression that had survived de-Stalinization and become entrenched during the Brezhnev-Andropov years. Vladimir Kryuchkov, head of the KGB branch for foreign intelligence, recalled that he had never doubted Gorbachev's devotion to the Soviet system and "socialism" and was horrified later by the extent of his "betrayal."²⁵¹

...The conservatives, the modernizers, and the military realized that the Soviet Union could ill afford its commitments in Central Europe, Afghanistan, and all over the world. And they advocated cautious retrenchment to postpone the crumbling of the Soviet sphere of influence. In contrast, Gorbachev and the "new thinkers" began to proclaim a policy of noninterference in Central Europe. Soon they would be leaving Soviet allies completely to their own devices. Still, the Politburo majority, the KGB, and the military did not imagine that Gorbachev would be prepared to bring the Cold War to an end, at the cost of destruction of the Soviet external empire in Central Europe and fatal instability in the Soviet Union itself.²⁵²

Absent Gorbachev's drastic reform agenda, the Soviet system most likely could have staggered along indefinitely. Instead, he unleashed massive pressures from below that brought it down.

Even with the economy and finances in steep decline, the Soviet Union still could hide its weak condition behind a respectable Potemkin facade and negotiate with the United States from a position of relative parity. After 1988, this situation drastically changed: Gorbachev's decision to launch radical political and state reforms, coupled with the removal of the party apparatus from economic life, created a most severe crisis of the state and produced centrifugal political forces that spun out of control within Soviet society. All this was tantamount to revolution, was visible to the world, and engulfed the Soviet leadership. These policies essentially destroyed the Soviet capacity to act like a superpower on the international arena. The Soviet Union was left in no position to bail out its allies or to present itself as an equal partner to the United States in negotiations.²⁵³

There are few other examples in history of a leader in charge of a huge ailing state who willingly risked the geopolitical position of a great power and the very foundations of his political power for the sake of a moral global project.²⁵⁴

By the spring of 1989, it became obvious even to Gorbachev's closest assistants that the radical reappraisal of Soviet ideology and history, initiated from above, had triggered a political deluge from below.²⁵⁵

And Gorbachev himself was constitutionally incapable or unwilling to resort to force to preserve the system when it became clear it would otherwise collapse.

²⁵¹ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, p. 296.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 302.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 307–308.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

An additional feature of Gorbachev's personality that perplexed contemporaries and witnesses was his deep aversion to the use of force. To be sure, skepticism about military force was widely shared among "new thinkers." It can also be regarded as a generational phenomenon that originated from the impact of World War II and was reinforced by the pacifist trends during the 1960s. Former Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko, for example, privately called Gorbachev and his advisers "the Martians," for their ignorance of the laws of power politics. "I wonder how puzzled must be the US and other NATO countries," he confessed to his son. "It is a mystery for them why Gorbachev and his friends in the Politburo cannot comprehend how to use force and pressure for defending their state interests." Gorbachev personified the reluctance to use force. Indeed, for him it was less a lesson from experience than a fundamental part of his character. The principle of nonviolence was a sincere belief for Gorbachev – not merely the foundation of his domestic and foreign policies but one of his personal codes. His colleagues and assistants confirm that "the avoidance of bloodshed was a constant concern of Gorbachev" and that "for Gorbachev an unwillingness to shed blood was not only a criterion but the condition of his involvement in politics." Gorbachev, they observe, "by character was a man incapable not only of using dictatorial measures, but even of resorting to hard-line administrative means." The critics claim that Gorbachev "had no guts for blood," even when it was dictated by state interests.²⁵⁶

As a result, Gorbachev simply let the communist regimes in Eastern Europe slip away, with no intention of intervening.²⁵⁷ Without Gorbachev and his personal idiosyncrasies, "the rapid disintegration of the Soviet Union itself would not have occurred. At each stage of the Soviet endgame, Gorbachev made choices that destabilized the USSR and sapped its strength to act coherently as a superpower."²⁵⁸

The loss of America's partner in condominium left it in the position of a sole superpower. But, as the United States learned the hard way, it also left the world in many ways less governable.

Kolko notes the subsequent disorders in Eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union itself, following the loss of the USSR as a stabilizing force:

The breakdown of the Cold War tension, as Undersecretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger confessed at the end of 1991, meant also loosening the control "of the international system over the behavior of its constituent members".... The U.S. ultimately had to concede that the Soviet Union's stabilizing role since 1945 had been vital to its interests, though none of its analysts ever adequately appreciated the magnitude of its contribution to curbing the left since 1944, for such insight would have destroyed the very foundations of their world view. In the case of the new status quo in Eastern Europe and the former USSR itself, the enormous peril of civil wars and bloody conflict between new and independent states, which the highest American officials had feared, began to be fulfilled immediately. For the first time since 1945, parts of Europe were again at war.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 318–319.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 321–323.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 334–335.

²⁵⁹ Kolko, *Century of War*, p. 450.

Hobsbawm, likewise, argues that it “suddenly removed the props which had held up the international structure and, to an extent not yet appreciated, the structures of the world’s domestic political systems.”

And what was left was a world in disarray and partial collapse, because there was nothing to replace them. The idea, briefly entertained by American spokesmen, that the old bi-polar order could be replaced by a ‘new world order’ based on the single superpower which remained in being, and therefore looked stronger than ever, rapidly proved unrealistic.²⁶⁰

The collapse of the communist regimes between Istria and Vladivostok not only produced an enormous zone of political uncertainty, instability, chaos and civil war, but also destroyed the international system that had stabilized international relations for some forty years. It also revealed the precariousness of the domestic political systems that had essentially rested on that stability.... The basic units of politics themselves, the territorial, sovereign and independent ‘nation-states’, including the oldest and stablest, found themselves pulled apart by the forces of a supranational or transnational economy, and by the infranational forces of secessionist regions or ethnic groups.²⁶¹

It’s true, as far as it goes, that the collapse of the USSR and the Soviet bloc ended the constraints resulting from their rivalry, and from the need to avoid direct superpower conflict. On the other hand, it eliminated the Soviet role in restraining revolutionary forces — a role which had been indispensable to the United States’ control over its own sphere of influence.

After a brief period of unipolarity in the 90s and early 00s, the world shifted to a hybrid or transitional state between a unipolar and multipolar order. There was a single global superpower by default; but it was discovering unexpected limits in Iraq and Afghanistan, and confronting Russia and China as rising regional powers.

²⁶⁰ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 255.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

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