1. Stalin and Soviet Foreign Policy

The most obvious conceptual problem in dealing with Soviet foreign policy in the postwar European landscape is the centrality of Stalin, his views, and his ability to implement them. Until the mid-1990s, historians assessed the actual role of Stalin in the making of Soviet foreign policy based on barely more than haphazard evidence. Such classic studies as Alfred Rieber’s *Stalin and the French Communist Party* or Ruth Fischer’s *Stalin and German Communism*, or even David Holloway’s recent and quite marvelous *Stalin and the Bomb*, more often than not used Stalin as a metaphorical figure for the Soviet Union and its foreign policy rather than as an actor on the international scene, distinct from other Soviet figures, V. M. Molotov and A. Ia. Vyshinskii, most notably.1 Before the opening of the Soviet-era archives, Stalin and the French Communist Party, 1941–1947 (New York, 1962); R. Fischer, Stalin and German Communism: a Study in the Origins of a State Party (Cambridge/Mass., 1948); D. Holloway, Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939–1956 (New Haven/Conn., 1994).
one could assert the most varied interpretations of Stalin’s role in the making of Soviet foreign policy with equal validity, including the thesis that Stalin played a minor role, and left foreign policy to Molotov in the Foreign Ministry, or to various party deputies, like A. A. Zhdanov, in the Central Committee. While the opening of the Russian archives can only be described as partial and uneven, and much important material remains classified, nevertheless it is now possible to assert that Stalin had the intention, the means, and the ability to control the overall design, as well as the thrusts and parries of Soviet foreign policy. «The rest of us», wrote N. S. Khrushchev, «were just errand boys». Molotov said something very similar when he noted that the decisive role in Soviet foreign policy was played by Stalin, and not by some diplomat. It is certainly true, as Jonathan Haslam has asserted, that Stalin left plenty of room for «bold subordinates», like Ivan Maisky or Maxim Litvinov, who were encouraged to think independently and set down their own ideas in writing outside the bureaucratic strictures of the hierarchy of the Foreign Ministry. Studies of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SVAG) demonstrate that Stalin’s lieutenants – like Vladimir Semenov, Political Advisor and S. I. Tiul’panov, Information Officer of the administration – had an extraordinary ability to develop and implement policies for the Soviet zone of occupation. Of course, the moment that Stalin made up his mind and closed down alternatives, he just as quickly removed his patronage from various underlings and abandoned them to meaningless jobs.

In postwar Europe, as in the interwar period, Stalin also made foreign policy through communist party channels; in many cases this was, in fact, the preferred mechanism for expressing Soviet interests. In the various iterations of the Foreign Information Committee of the Central Committee of the CPSU (b), Stalin maintained ongoing contacts with, provided instructions to, and received requests from European communist parties and their leaders. In the early postwar period, these

3 One of the most skilled practitioners of this art was Adam B. Ulam. See, especially, his Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy 1917–67 (New York, 1968). See also B. Meissner, Rußland, die Westmächte und Deutschland: die sowjetische Deutschlandspolitik, 1943–1953 (Hamburg, 1953), and M. Shulman, Stalin’s Foreign Policy Reappraised (Cambridge/Mass., 1963).
5 Sto sorok besed s Molotovym: Iz dnevnika F. Chueva (Moscow, 1991), 99.
8 The rich and diverse archives of this committee are located in the pre-1953 party archives, RGA-SPI (Rossiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial’no-politicheskoi istorii), fond (f.) 17, opis (op.) 128.
communications were supervised by Georgi Dimitrov, the famous Bulgarian communist hero of the anti-Nazi struggle, and later through prominent party figures like Andrei Zhdanov and Mikhail Suslov. Stalin’s direct conversations with European party leaders also serve as an important source for reconstructing his political thought and actions on the continent. For years, scholars relied on Milovan Djilas’s recollections in his *Conversations with Stalin* for essential information about Soviet intentions in Europe. Now there are scores of these conversations, running to in total thousands of pages. The protocols need to be read extremely carefully and «deconstructed» for unspoken codes and symbolic language. Stalin was expert in assuming roles, playing to his interlocutors’ weaknesses, dissembling, and using psychological bells and whistles, as a way to deceive contemporaries, but also, one sometimes thinks, historians. Moreover, it is critical, when they are available, to use both the Soviet protocols, which were recorded by official stenographers and sometimes were edited by Stalin, and the notes of the other party, whether German, French, Yugoslav, or Polish, though these were usually recorded after the actual meetings and have an aspect of wishful thinking to them. Still, taken as a whole, these conversations get to a level of detail and relative frankness that is simply absent in Stalin’s formal diplomatic meetings or in his informal discussions with non-communist leaders and delegations.

Finally, Stalin controlled Soviet foreign policy through his chief deputy in this realm, Viacheslav Molotov. One looks in vain in the Foreign Ministry archives for much information on their interaction. Recent indications to the contrary, the Molotov «fond» at the party archive remains, for the most part, inaccessible. But now that at least part of the internal party correspondence between Molotov and Stalin in the immediate postwar period is available to researchers from Stalin’s archive, there can be little doubt about the nature of the relationship. Stalin bullied and abused Molotov. He repeatedly upbraided him for «softness», for «kowtowing to foreigners», the worst of Soviet diplomatic sins, and for being excessively garrulous and imprecise in his negotiating posture. At the same time, Stalin watched his every move and, when Molotov was engaged in Council of Foreign Mini-

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10 For two new published collections of many of these documents, especially those consisting of conversations between Stalin, Molotov, and the East European communist leaders, see: T. V. Volo-
kotina et al., eds., *Vostochnaia Evropa v dokumentakh Rossiskikh Arkhivov, 1944–1953*, 2 vols. (Moscow—Novosibirsk, 1997, 1998), and T. V. Volo-
11 However, recent publications from the Foreign Ministry Archives (Arkhiv Vneshei Politiki Rossii Fede-
12 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 99, ll. 80–95. See my review of this relationship in «Cold War Studies and New Archival Materials about Stalin», *The Russian Review* 61 (2002), 1–15, 7–11. See also Vladimir Pechatnov, who was the first to use and analyze the Stalin and Molotov correspondence while it was still in the Presidential Archives: «Na etom voprose my slomaem ikh antisovets-
kie uporstvo…», *Istochnik*, no. 3 (1999), 92–104.

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Molotov fell into Stalin’s bad graces by the end of the 1940s. He was removed from his position as Foreign Minister and may well have been purged (along with Mikoyan) if Stalin had not died in March 1953. See Michael Ellman’s review essay, «The Road from I’lich to Il’ich: The Life and Times of Anastas Ivanovich Mikoyan», *Slavic Review* 60 (2001), 140–150, 146. For a rich and up-to-date study of the sometimes tortured relationship between Stalin and his lieutenants, including Molotov, see S. Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London, 2003).

For the historiography, especially of the formation of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe, see N. Naimark and L. Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944–1949* (Boulder/Col., 1997), 1–16. Much like Stalin’s negative reaction to the later development of «West Germany», the Soviets defined their interests after the war in such a way that the continent not be divided into west and east.

**2. The Question of Europe**

Most studies of postwar Soviet foreign policy tend to focus either on single countries, on the emergence of the Cold War, or on the development of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. The European continent is considered to be divided almost from the very beginning. Especially for the immediate postwar period, however, the notion of a «Western Europe» and an «Eastern Europe» does not make much sense. Both the realities and the fate of the continent were much more fluid, open, and contingent than that. To be sure, the new borders of the Soviet Union carved out by Stalin as a consequence of the Nazi-Soviet pact meant that Moscow’s interests would inevitably move westward. Moreover, Stalin’s interest in a sphere of influence in the rest of Poland, in Finland, and in Romania were consistent parts of Soviet geostrategic considerations during the war. But beyond these military and political interests, which overlapped, not coincidentally, with traditional Russian tsarist foreign policy aims, there was enormous variation and flexibility in Stalin’s short- and medium-term goals, whether one is talking about Hungary or Czechoslovakia, Austria and Germany, or France and Italy. Stalin treated the development of the «[West] European Union», the anti-German security agreement between France and Britain, later expanded to the Low Countries, initially with skepticism and eventually aversion. Much like Stalin’s negative reaction to the later development of «West Germany», the Soviets defined their interests after the war in such a way that the continent not be divided into west and east.
Some scholars have suggested that the precursor to Stalin’s thinking about the Soviet bloc was the development of the Slavic Committee, which was attached to the Central Committee of the CPSU (b). But the archives of the Slavic Committee demonstrate that its leaders were considered second-level politicians and that their heady ideas about the revival of Slavic brotherhood across the region of Eastern Europe ran into considerable opposition in the region itself, as well as in Moscow. Like nineteenth century Pan-Slavism, the Slavic Committee’s notions of Slavic unity dissipated as a consequence of Russian pretensions to being the «big brother» of the Slavic peoples, not to mention serious rivalries between Slavic nations of the region. As a consequence, the resuscitation of a Pan-Slav policy during the war had no more inherent meaning in Stalin’s conception of postwar Europe than the creation of a wartime Jewish anti-fascist committee had for the postwar status of Jews in the Soviet Union. The Jewish antifascist committee expired as a consequence of Stalin’s hostility and Soviet anti-Semitism in 1948. The Slavic Committee simply withered away in the postwar period as a consequence of Stalin’s neglect, the party’s complete disinterest, and the alleged treachery of the Yugoslavs.

There was no interest on the Soviet side in a divided continent at the end of the war. Conditions on the ground in Europe also did not divide neatly between east and west. On the one hand, one could make the argument that the widely diverse conditions of the prewar period, north and south, east and west, had been more or less leveled by the terrible costs of the war. Everywhere there was hunger, apathy, unemployment, fear, and – especially in the winter of 1946/47 – fierce cold. There were strikes in Milan, Paris, and Łódź. Frightful anti-Semitism was rampant in many societies after the war, despite – indeed, one could argue, because of – what the Nazis had done to the Jews. Resentment of ethnic minorities was ubiquitous and those conationals who had been abroad for years, worked in Germany, or were expelled from territories lost to the home nation were distrusted by the «native» populations. In some parts of Europe, ethnic cleansing was underway, not just during the war, but after its conclusion. Tens of millions of people were on the move: demobilized soldiers, returning POWs and forced laborers, expellees, settlers, and those in search of booty and work. Mark Mazower has correctly...
noted that there was both justifiable euphoria on the left and remarkable resilience on the right. There was a surge of communist and socialist support, as well as a steady reassertion of conservative power. There was revolution and there were attempts at restoration. And this holds for both eastern and western Europe. The lust for retribution and the need for justice quickly gave way in most of Europe to scapegoating and then to selective memory, as Europeans – Belgians, French, Dutch, Poles, and Czechs, among others – eagerly pursued the return to normality and regularity in their lives. Planning for postwar reconstruction was at the heart of government and politics in all of Europe.

Of course, there were major differences between the countries of Europe after the war, but these did not always break down on an East-West axis. Moreover, there was great diversity within single countries. Bombed-out and destroyed cities attracted new social groups to the rebuilding process. Cities that survived the war more or less intact had different political outlooks as well as social structures. The inhabitants of the capitals – like Warsaw, Budapest, and Paris – also exhibited distinct political characteristics, in contrast to those of provincial cities, like Cracow, Gyor, and Marseilles. As John Connelly and Padraic Kenney have shown, even in the Stalinist period, dating initially, depending on the country involved, from 1947 to 1950, there was still great internal diversity between countries and even within countries. Certainly in the 1940s, there was no such thing as a monolithic Soviet «bloc». This does not mean that by the late 1940s Stalin did not control a substantial amount of territory in what we know as «Eastern Europe». Rather, it means that one needs to think about these countries of the region as having very different political constellations that, at least from the perspective of the time, might well have indicated diverse futures.

3. The Cold War
That this did not happen and that Stalin left the continent divided at the time of his death on March 5, 1953, owes a great deal to the Cold War. There can be no question that the history of the Cold War weaves its way in and out of any consideration of the development of postwar Europe. A number of historians have examined the postwar history of the continent in terms of its centrality to the emergence of the

23 J. Connelly, Captive University: The Sovietization of East German, Czech, and Polish Higher Education, 1945–1956 (Chapel Hill/N.C., 2000), and P. Kenney, Rebuilding Poland: Workers and communists, 1945–1950 (Ithaca/N.Y., 1997). For a point of view that emphasizes commonalities in Eastern Europe, especially, see S. Creuzberger and M. Görtemaker, eds., Gleichschaltung unter Stalin: Die Entwicklung der Parteien im östlichen Europa 1944–1948 (Paderborn, 2002). The editors concede, however, that the developments in the region were so diverse that a Soviet «master plan» was unlikely. Ibid., 12.
Cold War. Moreover, any consideration of Stalin in this period inevitably intersects with the rich historiography of the Cold War. As John Lewis Gaddis puts it in *We Now Know: «As long as Stalin was running the Soviet Union a cold war was inevitable»*. Whether he is right or not, the history of Europe in the postwar period should begin with the proposition that the unquestionably antagonistic Soviet-American rivalry about the European settlement was, however, not necessarily always the dominant – and certainly not the only – factor of interest in determining the ultimate fate of the continent. Like the issue of prematurely dividing the continent, the historian should not read back the «Cold War» into every situation and event in the immediate postwar period. To state the problem a little differently, one cannot write the history of Soviet involvement in Europe without including the growing Soviet rivalry with the Americans and the then surprising involvement of the Americans with European affairs. But to blanket postwar European developments with the well-developed paradigms of Cold War historiography can do as much to obscure Stalin’s role as to enlighten it.

What were Stalin’s intentions regarding postwar Europe? There is little evidence that he had firm preconceived notions of the immediate future of the continent. Long-term, of course, the entire continent would become socialist, and the means for this transformation would vary according to the circumstances of the countries involved. The argument about whether Stalin can be understood in terms of an ideological commitment to the implementation of European revolutionary activity or whether he was a practitioner of *Realpolitik*, advancing the cause of the Soviet Union in a series of incremental and tactical feints and jabs, makes little sense in his case. He was fully committed to Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideology, as were his lieutenants. But he understood that the development of socialism on the continent, though both desirable and inevitable, would take time and effort. Patience and persistence would reap inevitable rewards. Every country would come to socialism differently, depending on a variety of national circumstances. There are two large countries in Europe proceeding towards socialism, Stalin told the leaders of the British Labor Party in a meeting of July 8, 1946 – the USSR and Great Britain. The former had to endure violence and revolution; the latter could achieve socialism by peaceful means.

Stalin probably read and shared many of the suppositions of two of the major policy planning documents to emerge from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during World War II, Maxim Litvinov’s «Memorandum» of January 11, 1945, and Ivan

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26 RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 286.
Maisky’s «Note» of January 10, 1944. The Litvinov document was prepared in association with the upcoming Yalta conference and explored the possibility of establishing an agreement about three spheres of influence on the continent: one in the east and north, including Finland, Sweden, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Turkey, that would be linked to the Soviet Union. A second zone would be dominated by Great Britain and include Holland, Belgium, France, Spain, Portugal, and Greece. Most interesting was the so-called «neutral» sphere, which included Germany, as well as Denmark and Norway, Austria and Italy. In this sphere, the great powers would share responsibility for the security of the area, cooperating on issues of reparations and trade.

According to the Maisky note, continental Europe would inevitably transform itself into a series of socialistic states, but, barring armed conflict, it would take somewhere between thirty and fifty years for this evolution to take place. Meanwhile, cooperation with the United States and Great Britain was critical for setting up democratic regimes and functioning economies in former fascist and fascist-occupied countries. Of course, Stalin was in no way bound by these visions, nor did he in any way put a «stamp of approval» on the documents. But they are useful in demonstrating a common Soviet interpretation of the postwar world, which envisioned — not Cold War between East and West — but serious political and perhaps even military clashes between Great Britain and the United States, as inevitable capitalist rivals for the spoils of the war. This analysis was promoted, in part, by the views of the Hungarian-born Soviet economist, Evgenii Varga, who predicted that in the postwar period, the fierce competition for European markets between the United States, which would inevitably be plagued by unemployment and depression as a consequence of demobilization at the end of the war, and Great Britain, which would seek to reassert its imperial prerogatives against American dominance, would provide the Soviets with peace at home and political, diplomatic and economic opportunities on the continent.

If Gaddis is right, and Stalin’s rule made the Cold War inevitable, Stalin certainly

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30 For example, Georgi Dimitrov writes in his diary of a discussion between the Bulgarians and Yugoslavs together with Stalin on January 18, 1945, in which Stalin emphasizes that the present alliances with «the democratic faction of the capitalists» against Hitler is unlikely to last past the end of the war, while indicating the the Slavic countries will eventually line up with the Soviet Union against the West. The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933–1949, ed. I. Banac (New Haven/Conn., 2003), 358.

31 RGASPI, f. 17, op. 128, d. 747, «Stenogramma soobshchenia akad. Varga o poslevoennom ekon. razviti»., May 18, 1945, discussion in the Section of International Information.
did not intend to get into a world-wide shoving match with the United States nor did he anticipate that one would emerge from the circumstances of the settlement following World War II. He had no firm plan for post-war Europe, not even what we would call today a «road map» for the development of a socialist continent. He was too tactically inclined for that. It is likely that he looked at the future of countries as diverse as Great Britain, Spain, Norway, Czechoslovakia, and Greece, and saw them in different potential constellations of peoples democratic governments, as coalitions of the left and middle, including communist parties, that would gradually stabilize their respective societies and rebuild their economies, based primarily on the model of state-controlled industries. Eventually, these countries might move by stages to more socialist-oriented governments, but not precipitously and not in the near future. As we know from the examples of Greece and Yugoslavia, as well as from his treatment of leftist revolutionaries all over the continent («sectarians» as they were known as in Soviet parlance), Stalin was not interested in fomenting socialist revolutions in Europe, nor was he anxious to alienate the Americans and British by assisting the elimination of non-communist parties of the left and center.\footnote{32}

With this kind of framework as a background, it is important to test ideas about Stalin’s intentions against concrete cases of Soviet policy implementation. How did these general views of strategic patience and tactical flexibility play out in concrete situations that emerged on the continent? The ones I will consider in brief are: the Soviet occupation of Bornholm; the Soviet occupation of Austria; the Berlin Blockade of 1948–49; the Albanian switch from Yugoslav to Soviet client; the April 1948 Italian elections; and the political struggle between Gomułka and Stalin. These cases were chosen not so much for their representativeness as for what they indicate about aspects of Soviet influence in Europe as a whole. They point above all to the diversity and complexity of Stalin’s aims on the continent. They also demonstrate that postwar Europe was in a state of flux: armies evacuated occupied territories; alliances were redefined; local politics mattered.

4. Bornholm

One of the most quoted statements of Stalin in Cold War historiography comes from Milovan Djilas’s Conversations with Stalin, where Stalin reportedly insists: «whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own social system. Everyone imposes his own system as far as his army can reach. It cannot be other-

The statement is often used to demonstrate that Stalin understood both that the Soviet system would be spread as far as the Red Army was able to march, and that the Anglo-Americans would impose their form of democracy on the territories that they liberated from the Nazis. The presence of Red Army forces in every area, however, did not assure the development of a Soviet-style system. (One could also point to those countries, like Czechoslovakia and Finland, where the immediate withdrawal of Soviet forces did not obviate the development of governments friendly to Moscow.)

The Soviets occupied the Danish island of Bornholm, located in the Baltic Sea, some 250 kilometers north of the German coast, from May 9, 1945, to April 5, 1946. As best we know, the decision to occupy Bornholm was based primarily on military considerations related to the occupation of Germany. The Soviets explained to the Danish people that the island would be temporarily occupied «until the military question in Germany had been solved». In this connection, there were no efforts made to «sovietize» the island or interfere in its governance. Sven Holtsmark points out that political considerations, having to do with influence over the regime in the Baltic straits, controlled by Denmark, ranked higher than military considerations in the Soviet calculations. The idea was to put pressure on Denmark to make concessions in the straits. There had been some thought in the Soviet Foreign Ministry during the war about sharing in the occupation of Denmark itself with the British and along with that establishing a base in Bornholm, as a way to extend more direct influence on Danish society. In addition to military considerations, the Soviets sought to secure their strategic interests in the Baltic by occupying Bornholm.

Even more interesting from an historical point of view is why the Soviets withdrew when they did. The United States government made little effort to pressure the Soviets to leave. The contemporary historiography of the evacuation focuses variably on such issues as U.S. moves in Greenland and the Faroe islands, the fate of the Svalbard (Spitsbergen) Archipelago and Bear Island in the Norwegian far

33 Djilas, Conversations, 114.
39 In discussions with the Norwegians (July 5, 1945) Molotov put forward «an outright claim» to Bear Island and insisted that Spitsbergen be ruled by a joint Russo-Norwegian condominium to protect Russian communications lines. U. S. Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS) (Washington/D.C., 1945) vol. V, 91.


42 As a consequence of fierce Cold War tensions, the Danes gave the Soviets every reason to believe that evacuation from the island would have positive ramifications for Soviet-Danish relations. The Danes engaged in what The Manchester Guardian called «tactical silence» regarding the Bornholm question, fearful of offending the Soviets and prolonging their occupation. Despite considerable worry in Copenhagen, the Danish government convinced the Danish press to curtail critical articles about the Soviet occupation and not to raise issues of the duration of the occupation. Although there were sufficient reasons that Moscow might wish to establish a long-term position on Bornholm, given the proximity of the Western approaches to the Baltic Sea and the likelihood that they would be denied control of the Kiel Canal through its internationalization, the Soviets did not in the end pressure the Danes to make concessions. The Soviets asked instead that were they to evacuate the island they would not look favorably on the presence of foreign troops – meaning the Americans – on Danish soil, including Greenland and the Faroes. Danish restraint on these and other Western security issues can be dated, in some measure, from the time of the Soviet evacuation.

5. Austria

The Soviets withdrew their troops from Austria, as well as Bornholm, though it took until the signing of the State Treaty in 1955 for the Soviets to leave Austria. The question of why the Soviets signed the State Treaty when they did is discussed in considerable detail in the historiography, though without, in general, the benefit of using internal Soviet archives. Equally interesting, but much less discussed, is the question of why the Soviets stayed as long as they did, given the fact that the occupation of Austria was costly financially and unnecessary from a long-term strategic standpoint. Scholars have argued that the Soviets could justify the presence of their troops in Hungary with reference to the need to support their occupation of Austria. The initial justification for the maintenance of troops in Poland was to sustain lines of military communications from eastern Germany to

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the Soviet Union. Some historians have also suggested that the Austrian State Treaty was tied to the successful resolution of the German question. Despite these arguments, after the first year of the occupation, it was clear to everyone, including the Soviet authorities in Austria and in Moscow, that the ongoing presence of Red Army troops in Austria undermined positive Austrian-Soviet relations and made the Austrian communist party even more unpopular than it already was. Initial Soviet concerns about the joining of Austria to Germany (a «new Anschluss») or about an Austrian-centered Danubian federation quickly dissipated. Once the Soviets had exploited oil reserves in the eastern part of the country and removed those industries they deemed necessary to rebuilding back home, there was no more reason to be there, especially if they could be compensated for the relatively unproductive and uncompetitive industries directed by the so-called USIA (Administration for Soviet Property in Austria).

According to the Moscow Declaration on Austria of November 1, 1943, the Great Powers declared that Austria was a victim of Nazi aggression and deserved to be returned to a state of independence as it was prior to 1938. There was no talk of a long-term occupation of Austria and no intent to remain beyond the time necessary to insure the final defeat of the Third Reich. In preparation for the occupation, Stalin stated clearly to Dimitrov: «We want Austria restored to its status quo as of 1938». When the Soviets marched into Vienna in April of 1945, their proclamation «To the Austrian People» reiterated that Austria fell «as the first victim of German aggression» and that the Red Army would liberate the Austrians from «German-Prussian domination». Immediately, the Soviet authorities sought out Karl Renner, head of the Austrian Social Democratic Party – «that old fox», as Stalin called him – to run the new Austrian administration. The Western Allies were initially very hesitant about Renner and his administration, fearing that he was too much of a leftist and would be too compliant with Soviet wishes. But Renner proved to be strikingly adept at keeping the trust of the Soviets and allowing the communists of the KPÖ to join his administration, while following his own «Austrian» national path. That the Austrians themselves approved of this path.
was demonstrated in the election of December 1945, which was, from the Soviet and KPÖ point of view, a catastrophic defeat. The communists received only 5.4 percent of the vote, in comparison to almost 45 percent for the Social Democrats, and, most surprisingly, 50 percent for the Austrian People’s Party.

Although it is unlikely that Stalin and the Soviets had any interest in occupying Austria longer than was necessary to insure their claims to German assets and veto Austria’s potential integration with Germany, the elections made crystal-clear that they could not count on support from the Austrian population for their presence. Between December 1945 and June 1946, when the Austrian government was recognized by the four-power occupation as having control over its own laws, the attitude of the West towards the Renner government changed radically. Now the British and the Americans were much more supportive of extending Austrian government sovereignty than were the Soviets, who were frustrated and annoyed by Renner’s growing power and independence. Still, there was considerable hope in western diplomatic circles and in Austria that a State Treaty could be signed and occupation forces withdrawn. But two obstacles stood in the way. One was Soviet claims on German assets in Austria, as initially defined at Potsdam, and eventually involved compensation for the USIA-run industries; the second was the Soviets’ backing in 1946 and 1947 of Yugoslav border demands on Austrian Carinthia.

Khrushchev claimed in his memoirs published during the Gorbachev period that Stalin’s desire to support Yugoslav demands in Trieste were critical to the Austrian negotiations. After the Soviet-Yugoslav split became public in June 1948 and Tito proved more resistant to Soviet pressure than Stalin had anticipated, it was no longer desirable to back Yugoslav claims. Khrushchev reports: “I remember Stalin saying, ‘We didn’t sign any peace treaty [with Austria]. Why did we have to refuse to sign? That was a mistake, all because of Trieste. Now that issue doesn’t even exist anymore.’” Audrey Kurth Cronin believes that the Soviets were ready to sign the State Treaty during the June 1949 Paris Foreign Ministers conference. The Yugoslav border issues were no longer important and the Soviets and the West had come to an understanding about compensation for Moscow’s economic assets in Austria. In her view, disagreements among the Western powers and within the U.S. government between the Departments of State and Defense delayed the signing. By the time the West had its negotiating house in order and returned to the Soviets with a firm proposal in hand in November 1949, the Soviets were no longer willing to come to the table.

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51 AVPRF, «Ob Avstrii», no. 3797–g.
53 Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes, 72.
Khrushchev’s portrait of Stalin repeatedly returning to the issue of signing the State Treaty is backed up by internal Soviet documents that show Stalin’s interest in getting out of Austria even before problems with the Yugoslavs emerged. Andrei Zhdanov, in his discussions with visiting Austrian communist leaders Johann Koplenig and Friedl Fürnberg (February 13, 1948), represented the Central Committee of the CPSU (b) and, no doubt, Stalin. Zhdanov berated the Austrians for being satisfied with the occupation of their country and for looking to the division of Austria between east and west to solve their problems. «The TsK of the KPÖ builds its tactics on the proposition that Soviet troops should stay for an extended period on Austrian territory. The TsK of the CPSU (b) does not agree». The Austrian communists should not be depressed by the «perspective of the liquidation of the occupation regime». Instead, they should seize the moment for defending the full national sovereignty of Austria, which is the wish of true Austrian democrats and patriots. The presence of Soviet occupation troops in Austria is a «necessary evil» but an «evil» nonetheless, that needed to be removed in order for Austria to develop in a democratic fashion. Zhdanov concluded by advising the KPÖ chiefs to seize the issues of independence, sovereignty and the removal of occupation troops from the right and center of the political spectrum and staunchly to defend the Austrian national cause.

We still have no firm understanding of why Stalin allowed the Austrian situation to stagnate after the initiatives of 1948–1949 came to naught. The number of occupation troops in the west and east had dwindled to nominal numbers, and the Austrian government almost completely controlled the internal policies of the country. We know from Khrushchev that Stalin episodically returned to the subject before his death. Clearly, there were those in Austria, pro-Soviet communists and pro-Western democrats, who saw it in their interests to prolong the occupation. But the Austrian government and the vast majority of the Austrian people longed for an end to the four-power presence. Only Khrushchev’s determination to act on the State Treaty after Stalin’s death ended the anomaly of the unwanted and counterproductive occupation.

6. Berlin Blockade

The American involvement in the history of the blockade, from June 1948 to May 12, 1949, is explored in detail in Western historiography. But we are only beginning to gain access to very limited documentation about Stalin’s intentions and
actions in this crisis. For example, the release of some Soviet military documents has made it clear that at the time of the blockade Stalin neither mobilized Red Army troops nor placed his forces in the Soviet Zone on a war footing.\textsuperscript{57} At the same time, there are indications, very hard to substantiate, that Stalin was building the capacity to launch air and land assaults on Alaska from the Far East.\textsuperscript{58}

One can state reasonably confidently that the blockade was a political move on Stalin’s part, much like his later March 1952 note, offering to withdraw from Germany in return for German neutrality. In 1948, Stalin staged the crisis in Berlin to prevent the formation of a German government in the west, just as in 1952 he sought to prevent the West German government from joining NATO. Meanwhile, his minimum goal in 1948 was to prevent the adoption of western currency into Berlin and to absorb West Berlin into the Soviet zone. The East German communist leader, Wilhelm Pieck told Stalin during a March 26, 1948, meeting that his party would be glad «if the [western] allies were removed from Berlin». Stalin replied: «Let’s do it, with our common efforts let’s try, and maybe we’ll be successful».\textsuperscript{59} A gamble on Stalin’s part, no doubt, but one that he thought he could win.

The issues involved in the Berlin Blockade were clear to both sides. The Soviets told anyone who would listen that the blockade would be lifted if the proclamation of a West German state were put aside and the introduction of the Western «B» mark in Berlin was reversed. Although the Western powers offered some concessions on the currency issue, Stalin played his hand to the hilt. He was sure the West would cave in once it realized it could not supply the Berliners with sufficient food and materials through the airlift to survive the winter. Not even the calling of the constitutional assembly for the new West German state on September 1, 1948, shook his confidence in the plan. He was certain the West could not afford to go to war over Berlin, just as the Western powers were certain Stalin did not intend war.\textsuperscript{60}

Stalin miscalculated on several counts. First of all, the West would not back down over Berlin. To be sure, there were voices in the American government which suggested that Berlin was not worth fighting a war over and that withdrawal was a reasonable option.\textsuperscript{61} In a memoir from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the National Security Council, July 2, 1948, James Forrestal stated that it was worth considering «the possibility that some justification might be found for withdrawal of our occupation forces from Berlin without undue loss of prestige». Were the West Berliners to suffer excessive hardship in the coming winter, then withdrawal

should at least «be borne in mind». But, along with the porous boundaries of the blockade itself, the airlift proved to be able to supply sufficient food and coal to Berlin for the population to survive the winter. Stalin also miscalculated the effects of the blockade on Berlin’s population in the western sectors. His expectation was that growing shortages and unemployment would intensify dissatisfaction among Berliners with the Western Allies. With supplies assured to their compatriots in the Soviet zone, the population of West Berlin would put pressure on the allies to concede, even demanding to join the East. To intensify the atmosphere of crisis and division, the Soviets put additional pressure on the West Berliners by excluding them from the Berlin Magistrat, which met in the eastern sector, and taking control of the city’s police.

Stalin often misread public opinion on the continent and its fragile relationship with «democracy» and the western community. Instead of turning their back on the western allies, the Berliners – urged on by their charismatic mayor, Ernst Reuter – actually rallied to the cause of the Allies and made the airlift into a symbol of defiance against the Soviet Union and Stalin. It would have been hard to predict this outcome before the events themselves, since West Berliners spent most of their efforts in the daily struggle for economic survival. Postwar escapism was rampant. The growing division of the city and the Berliners’ isolation from the western zones compounded the indifference many felt towards politics. Paradoxically, the blockade created an atmosphere of political will for the first time since the war. At an emotional rally of nearly 300,000 Berliners at Brandenberg Gate on September 9, 1949, protesting the violence of the East German authorities against the Magistrat, Reuter called out to the world to look at Berlin and see how its people were ready to defend freedom and liberty.

Stalin gave the orders to end the blockade on May 9; the Politburo was called on May 10 to pass the formal resolution already decided by «the boss». According to Khrushchev, Stalin had initiated the blockade without discussion in the Politburo; it was also concluded without debate. Although Stalin had earlier consulted both his military and diplomatic plenipotentiaries about the possibility of suspending communications between the Western zones of occupation and Berlin (the word «blockade» was never used in the Soviet documents), he made the decisions and initiated the policies. The Russian historian of Germany, Aleksei Filitov, states that it is hard to call Stalin’s moves in this case a «policy», since serious diplomatic approaches were suspended during the actual blockade; instead, it was «a very

62 National Security Archive (NSA), Memorandum for the NSC from the Joint Chiefs, July 26, 1948, «U.S. Military courses of Action with respect to the Situation in Berlin», 1–2.
63 See A. Richie, Faust’s Metropolis: A History of Berlin (New York, 1998), 671. Richie also tells the story of Reuter assuring General Lucius Clay that the Berliners would not abandon the Allies when the going got tough during the airlift. Ibid., 663.
crude and one-sided administrative action». The Allies continued the airlift until late September and maintained contingency plans to take it up again in case of another blockade, Stalin now took up the new tactic of a peace campaign to keep Germany out of the Western alliance. The Council of Foreign Ministers meeting scheduled for May 23 in Berlin was to address the disputed issues of the status of Germany and of Berlin’s currency, in the end to no avail. Both Berlin and Germany were divided even more than before the crisis started, and now there was a West Berlin population with a sense of western identity and purpose. As a CIA report at the time put it: «On the Soviet side, the blockade has increased the anti-Soviet sentiment of Germans and temporarily, at least, strengthened their attachment to the Western camp».

7. The Albanian Backflip
Enver Hoxha and the Albanian communist movement emerged from the Second World War firmly under the direction of their sponsor, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito. Stalin showed little interest in Albania during the war and seemed perfectly willing to leave its affairs to the Yugoslavs. As Stalin reminded Hoxha later on, Albania was a backward and mountainous country, whose socialist pretensions needed taming. Even after the war, Stalin wanted the Yugoslavs to handle the fate of the Albanian revolution, in good measure because, as in the case of Greece, he was anxious to avoid outright British and American intervention, which might force his hand in the Mediterranean. Stalin was willing to help the Albanians – and through them, the Greek partisans – with arms and supplies, but only by way of Yugoslav channels. Stalin assured Tito in a meeting of May 1946 that the Soviet Union would have nothing against including Albania in the Yugoslav federation, but he thought for the moment it might complicate the favorable resolution of the Trieste question, and therefore advised the Yugoslavs to wait. The Soviets carried on minimal relations with the Albanians, while Tito and his comrades increasingly took charge of the Albanian party and its military affairs, which was formalized in the Yugoslav-Albanian Friendship Treaty of July 9, 1946.

But Stalin did not stay out of Albanian affairs for long. On the one hand, he set up direct contacts with the Albanian leadership when Enver Hoxha and Koçi Xoxe met with him in Moscow in July 1947. On the other, the Soviet leadership was become increasingly annoyed with the way in which the Yugoslavs kept all of the

66 A. M. Filitov, Germanskii vopros: ot raskola k ob’edinieniu (Moscow, 1993), 104.
67 NSA, CIA Report: «The Soviet Position in Approaching the CFM», May 18, 1949, 3. As a consequence, the report concludes that the Soviets would most likely turn to a conciliatory policy on Germany, seeking unification, the withdrawal of occupation forces, and detente in Europe. The Intelligence Organization of the State Department submitted its «dissent», suggesting instead that the Soviets would not be willing to sacrifice its controlling position in the east. Ibid., 9.
Albanian cards in their own hand.\textsuperscript{70} It was one thing to turn over the management of Albanian affairs to Belgrade; it was another that the Yugoslavs monopolized information about and control of the Albanian state. The tug-of-war between the Soviets and Yugoslavs intensified in the fall of 1947, symbolized by the suicide of Naku Spiru in November, whom Molotov later identified as «a good worker and a friend of the USSR».

Spiru had been sharply criticized by the Yugoslavs for obstructing Albanian-Yugoslav relations and was under attack by the Albanian party, along with his wife and several associates, when he killed himself. Meanwhile, the Yugoslavs were so confident of their position in Tirana that they attempted to secure agreement from the Albanians to remove Soviet advisors.\textsuperscript{72} Hoxha, on his part, seemed pleased that the Albanian party had purged its anti-Yugoslav faction. The line of the party had been upheld: gradual integration with Yugoslavia to the point of a unified «state-confederation».

Tensions between Moscow and Belgrade about control of Albanian affairs prompted Stalin to initiate a series of discussions with the Yugoslavs in Moscow. The first took place on January 27, 1948, with Milovan Djilas and several Yugoslav military leaders, in which Stalin stated that «we have no special interest in Albania. We agree that Yugoslavia should swallow Albania». Issues between the Yugoslav and Soviet advisors in Tirana could be worked out. But, in fact, Stalin was angry that Tito wanted to send a division or two of Yugoslav troops to Albania, ostensibly to defend its southern border against Greek monarchist incursions. At a February 10, 1948 meeting between the Soviets and the Bulgarian and Yugoslav leadership, Molotov broached the issue by stating that the Soviets just happened to hear at the end of January 1948 about these Yugoslav military plans. «The Albanians said they were sure that this was done with our permission», Molotov stated. With typical sarcasm, Stalin added: «The Yugoslavs, apparently, are afraid that we will take Albania away from them. You must take Albania, but wisely». According to the Soviet record of the meeting, Stalin added that the Yugoslavs «believe that we are tearing away from them their union both with Bulgaria and with Albania, and want

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 226.

\textsuperscript{71} Discussions between Hoxha and Molotov, June 24, 1948, in Vostochnaia Evropa, ed. Volokotina, et al., vol. 1, 905.

\textsuperscript{72} R. Craig Nation thinks that the Yugoslavs, worried about Soviet interest in Yugoslavia, were anxious to proceed with the incorporation of Albanian into their federation. R. C. Nation, «A Balkan Union? Southeastern Europe in Soviet Security Policy, 1944–45», in The Soviet Union and Southeastern Europe in the Cold War, ed. Gori and Pons, 134.

\textsuperscript{73} Volokotina, et al., Moskva i Vostochnaia Evropa, 502.

\textsuperscript{74} Djlilas, Conversations, 143. This is the famous passage where Djilas objected that the Yugoslavs were interested in federation, not annexation, and Stalin responded: «Yes, yes, swallowing, here we are in agreement. You must swallow Albania, the sooner the better».

\textsuperscript{75} The following account of the February 10 meeting is taken from the Cold War International History Project Bulletin, no. 10 (1998), 128–134. This includes the original translation of the report of Milovan Djilas from the Yugoslav archives, as well as substantial citations from the Bulgarian and Soviet versions of the same meeting. A translation of the Bulgarian account is also available in The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, February 10, 1948, 436–444.
to present us with a fait accompli». In any case, stated Stalin, no Yugoslav division should be sent to Albania. It would only invite intervention from the United States, which had bases in the region. «Of all the tangles in the struggle between reaction and democracy», Stalin added, «the Albanian knot is our weakest link». Albania was neither in the United Nations nor was it recognized by the United States and Great Britain. He felt that disturbing its status could too easily lead to war.

During the spring of 1948, the conflict between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia shifted focus, from sparring about Albania, the Balkan Confederation, and Greece, to serious disputes about the role of Soviet advisors in Yugoslavia itself. By the late spring and early summer, when the Yugoslavs were formally attacked by the Cominform, even Western officials picked up on the significance of a split between Stalin and Tito. The Albanians also noticed the growing rift, and Hoxha, especially, sought to reposition himself in the Moscow camp, portraying his earlier Yugoslav sympathies as a product of Belgrade’s deceptions. He also quickly came to the defense of the deceased Spiru, who had also been, Hoxha noted to Molotov (June 25, 1948), «a victim of the intrigues of the Yugoslavs». At that moment, Hoxha confessed, he had made a severe mistake, falling under Belgrade’s influence. But he blamed that on Koçi Xoxe, who had been the point man for the Yugoslavs in the Albanian Politburo. At a plenum of the Central Committee of the Albanian party in September 1948, Hoxha denounced Xoxe not only for working at the behest of the Yugoslavs but, as Minister of Interior, for instituting a reign of secret police terror on the Albanian party and working class. In this connection, he compared Xoxe to Aleksandar Ranković, whom the Soviets accused of being a central figure in the Tito «clique». With Soviet approval, Hoxha moved to assume greater powers in Albanian affairs at the September plenum. He also expelled Xoxe from the party in November 1948 and, in June 1949, had him tried and executed for his alleged treachery.

Stalin, who had earlier talked about removing Hoxha from power, not «hastily and crudely – the boot on the throat – but gradually and indirectly», now accepted Hoxha’s Albania as a Soviet ally and potential counterweight to the Yugoslavs. He sent military advisors to try to deal with shoring up Albania’s rag-tag army. Stalin – who had always been skeptical of the Greek partisan effort – insisted that the Albanians get out of the business of helping the Greeks by providing them safe haven, supplies, and weapons. As a consequence of both Soviet and now Yugoslav and

76 See, for example, note of the Chargé in Yugoslavia (Robert B. Reams) to the Secretary of State, June 18, 1948: «Tito’s apparent decision to challenge Stalin instead of recanting past errors may well be most significant political event here since US recognition and event presages possibility split in Soviet bloc…». FRUS (1948), vol. IV, 1073.
78 Volokotina, et al., Moskva i Vostochnaia Evropa, 504.
Albanian indifference, the Greek revolution was doomed. With Hoxha’s prompting, Albania became the most Stalinist of East European countries.

8. The Italian Elections of Spring 1948

The development of Italy in the postwar years was crucial to the future of the continent. The strength of the communists (PCI) and the leftist partisan movement during the war and liberation gave cause for optimism in Moscow that a form of peoples democratic government would eventually win control of the country. This would keep British interests, especially, at bay, and prompt socialist or quasi-socialist reforms in the economy. After a meeting with Stalin on March 3–4, 1944, Palmiro Togliatti, head of the PCI, returned to Italy and pronounced his famous «Svolta di Salerno», which set out the surprising communist policy for years to come: cooperation with the bourgeois government (in this case with Badoglio’s) in the name of promoting democracy and defeating fascism at home and on the continent.  

From Dimitrov’s diary (March 5, 1944), we have a good picture of Stalin’s arguments to Togliatti for conciliation rather than striking for power. A division of left and right in Italy, Stalin maintained, only helps the British, «who would like to have a weak Italy on the Mediterranean». «For Marxists, form never has decisive significance». Therefore it is a positive step for communists to join the Badoglio government in order that a strong and independent Italy be assured. Communists should be at the forefront of defending the national cause.  

As a consequence, the partisans were ordered to keep their weapons in the underground and their organizations intact, but not to oppose the new government. Despite the increasingly desperate economic situation in Italy and the sharpening political tensions between right and left, Togliatti, in constant contact with Moscow, pursued a policy of cooperation with the parties of the left and center, and, until May 1947, participated in a series of Christian Democratic dominated coalition governments, led by Alcide De Gaspari. But the intensification of the Cold War disrupted Togliatti’s (and Stalin’s) tactics. In particular, the announcement of the Marshall Plan in June 1947 put the Italian communists in a terrible position, since they were forced to denounce it and its introduction into Italy. Moreover, Stalin was increasingly unhappy with the results of the parliamentary strategies of the Italian and French Communist parties. As a consequence, he initiated the founding meeting of the Cominform in September 1947 at Szklarska Poręba in Poland, in part as a way to radicalize their efforts.  

Togliatti understood that his conciliatory actions

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81 The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov, March 5, 1944, 304.
would be subject to severe criticism at the meeting and sent his deputies, Luigi Longo and Eugenio Reale, in his place. «If they should reproach you for not having been able to seize power or for letting us be ousted from the government», Togliatti told them, «tell them that we could not turn Italy into a second Greece».  

In part as a consequence of Cominform criticism, radicals in the PCI, like Pietro Secchia, urged the party to take its cause to the streets, supported by increasingly restless armed supporters in the north. But in a meeting with Secchia in December 1947, Stalin once again urged caution. There should be no uprising, which would inevitably, in his view, arouse the Western Allies, especially the Americans, and potentially lead to full-scale military intervention. «We maintain that an insurrection should not be put on the agenda, but one must be ready, in case of an attack by the enemy».

In a similar meeting with Maurice Thorez, leader of the French Communist Party, Stalin urged preparations for defense, as a way to avoid inviting counterrevolution and of repulsing it if it occurred, but no armed initiatives. The main thing is that one not be weak. «It is important to remember», Stalin lectured Thorez, «that the enemy takes no pity on the defenseless, the weak».

Despite the Cominform’s criticisms of the Italians’ parliamentary tactics, Stalin nevertheless encouraged Togliatti’s efforts to garner support among the Italian middle classes, in order for his coalition of communists and socialists to win the upcoming elections of April 1948. Togliatti was legitimately optimistic about his chances. George Kennan was so worried about the communists coming to power by means of the ballot box that he wrote a panicky memo (March 15, 1948), suggesting that rather than taking the chance of losing the elections to the communists, the U.S. government should advise the Italian government to outlaw the communist party, provoking a civil war and using American troops to reoccupy parts of Italy. «This would admittedly result in much violence and probably a military division of Italy», Kennan wrote, but it would be preferable to a «bloodless election victory» by the communists, which would constitute a disastrous political defeat in Italy and Europe as a whole.

Instead, the American government undertook a series of propaganda initiatives aimed at undermining communist support. Hundreds of copies of Greta Garbo’s darkly anti-Soviet «Ninotchka» were dubbed in Italian and spread throughout the boot of Italy for common viewing. The U.S. government also prompted Italian-American groups to engage in a widespread letter-writing campaign to their relatives back in Italy, warning of the dangers of communism and promoting the cause of liberal democracy. Most importantly, the
Americans made barely veiled threats about the curtailment of Marshall Plan aid to Italy if the elections turned out the Christian Democrats in favor of the communist-socialist coalition. These tactics were so successful and worried Togliatti so much that he urged Stalin, in the end with little consequence, to promise shipments of Soviet grain to Italy and initiate USSR-Italy trade agreements to bolster the cause of the left in the elections. For the purposes of the elections, the Soviets made some last-minute concessions to Italian claims on their former colonies; but this hardly offset the problems created for the communists by Soviet support of Yugoslav demands for Trieste.

The Italians themselves also mobilized their meager resources to combat the influence of the left in society, to be sure with generous financial contributions from CIA operatives. The Italian Catholic Church and a series of Italian social organizations were especially motivated by the Prague coup (February 1948) to hold electoral meetings and spread anti-communist literature. Sunday sermons in Church focused on the potential disaster for Italy if the communists and social democrats were elected. The Vatican also was directly involved in the anti-communist campaign. The attempts by the Togliatti-led PCI-PSI coalition to portray themselves as believers, much to the disgust of many of the left, fell short of convincing the electorate. To many observers’ surprise, the Christian Democrats soundly defeated the communist-led coalition.

Togliatti was a devoted Stalinist, like the French communist Maurice Thorez. But he was more moderate than Thorez and less dependent intellectually and politically on Stalin’s immediate advice. It is hard to judge from the documents we now have whether he was able to influence Stalin in some manner of speaking. Elena Ago-Rossi and Victor Zaslavsky insist that he was completely subservient to Moscow. But as Silvio Pons has suggested, at the very least he was able to lay out the policy alternatives from which Stalin could and did choose. Although

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89 NSA, Interview with Mark Wyatt, February 15, 1996. Wyatt, who served with the CIA in Italy, considers the four months leading up to the Italian election of 1948 to be the first serious CIA covert operation in its young history, setting precedents for decades to come.
92 Pons, «Stalin, Togliatti, and the Origins of Cold War», 8–9; Aga-Rossi and Zaslavsky, «The Soviet Union and the Italian Communist Party», 174–175. Here they write: «The image of the PCI as a ›national party«, skillfully cultivated by Togliatti, is particularly damaged by the [newly accessible] Soviet documents».
remaining loyal to the cause of Stalin and the Cominform, Togliatti gradually, but perceptibly, developed his own strategy for keeping the PCI from being marginalized in Italian society. He seemed to have one eye always on the ability of the communists to contribute to the development of Italian democracy and to participate in it. For example, when Stalin urged Togliatti to take over as General Secretary of the Cominform in 1951, as a way to breathe new life into the tired and increasingly useless organization, Togliatti found a way to decline, devoting himself instead to building the PCI’s organization and intellectual foundations.

9. Poland: Stalin and Gomulka

Stalin was determined from the beginning of the war to include Poland within Moscow’s sphere of influence. During the period of the Nazi-Soviet pact, 1939–1941, this meant partitioning Poland with Hitler and incorporating eastern Poland into Soviet Belorussia, Ukraine, and Lithuania. From the onset of the Grand Alliance, Stalin pursued a different policy regarding Poland, one that sought to maintain the territorial gains of the Nazi-Soviet Pact, lost during the Nazi assault, while creating a new «independent» Poland from Polish and German territory liberated from Hitler’s forces. Stalin gradually came to insist on the Oder-Neisse as the western boundary for the new postwar Polish state; the Western Allies concurred at Yalta and Potsdam. The final borders of Poland would ostensibly be confirmed by a future peace conference.

Given Stalin’s determination to limit Polish independence by insisting on a government «friendly» to the USSR, and given the territorial seizures from Germany, which would increase Poland’s dependence on Moscow for geographical security, one might well ask what is interesting or dynamic about the Polish case. Yet, from the emergence of the Soviet bloc in late 1947 to its demise in 1989, Poland was always one of the weakest links in the Soviet controlled chain. In the late 1940s, this problem was represented by the stubborn resistance of the Polish party leader, Władysław Gomułka, the author of the so-called «Polish road to socialism», to Moscow’s dictates. This was not at all apparent in the first two years of communist rule in Poland, from late 1944 to late 1946, because Gomułka’s own views of Poland’s future dove-tailed nicely with Stalin’s criticism of sectarian communist leftism and apparent tolerance of the PPS’s (Polish Socialist Party) participation in government and politics. Even Gomułka’s hands-off attitude towards the Church and Polish peasantry was echoed in Stalin’s own pronouncements on these subjects. But as the first meeting of the Cominform in September 1947 (in Szklarska Poręba) heightened the pressures for the Stalinization of European parties and institutions, in both east and west, Gomułka was increasingly isolated among Polish party leaders. In September 1948, he was denounced as a nationalist by the Polish Central Committee. In November 1949, Gomułka was removed from the party along with a coterie of his followers, and in July 1951, he was placed under
house arrest.93 Yet Gomułka was never tried, not to mention executed, as were many of his cohort in other parts of communist-ruled Europe. He survived to return to power in 1956. Many of his un-Soviet like policies – opposition to collectivization, toleration of the Church, support for bloc parties – took hold in Poland, despite Stalin’s earlier pressure to the contrary.

For our purposes, the interesting part of the Gomułka story is the way he continued to engage in politics – to buttress his position, outflank his opponents and survive – even after his denunciation by the Polish Central Committee. In particular, he played what might be called «the Jewish card», which had always been a powerful instrument of modern Polish politics. Although it is probably incorrect to accuse him of «anti-Semitism», Gomułka genuinely thought that there were far too many Jews in the Polish party hierarchy, a situation, he felt, that inhibited the development of good Polish worker cadres. He also thought that his own problems with accusations of «nationalism» were the consequence of his criticism of party leaders on this Jewish issue.

At the end of 1948, Stalin tried to woo Gomułka back to party work, asking him in a personal meeting of December 9, 1948, to stand for elections to the newly formed Politburo of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR). In his December 14 response to Stalin, Gomułka refused Stalin’s entreaty, placing much of the blame for the woes of the Polish party and his own fate directly on the Jews. Gomułka claimed that most rank-in-file party members knew that he had done everything he could to limit the influx of Jews into the party leadership. The sheer number of visible Jews, he wrote, encumbered party work «among the intelligentsia, also in the countryside, but, most importantly, among the working class». Gomułka took part of the responsibility on himself for the high percentage of Jews in the leading party and state organizations, because, after all, he had been the leader of the Polish party. But it was primarily the Jewish comrades, he claimed, who were to blame. They ignored his admonitions about the number of Jews they recruited and they did what they wanted despite him. Not only did they frustrate his attempts to deal with the problem at various junctures, they even threatened to «end» his party activities if he persisted. Gomułka told Stalin that one of the reasons he did not want to go back to the Politburo was the problem of the Jewish leadership; they would employ all their devious methods again to defeat him on this issue.94

Gomułka pointed out to Stalin that the issue was not just one of the number of Jews in the party and the perception of their ubiquitousness. After years of obser-

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vation, stated Gomulka, he had become convinced that a very large number of Jewish comrades «do not feel tied to our Polish people» and do not have particularly warm feelings for the Polish working class. Gomulka did not accuse the Jews of «cosmopolitanism», a denunciation that would soon come into common usage, but rather of «national nihilism». Everyone understood this problem, claimed Gomulka, but no one had the courage to talk about it openly. Especially once he himself was attacked for «nationalism», it would have been hard to attack Jewish comrades for supporting so many of their numbers in the party leadership. «I believe it is necessary not only to curtail the further percentage growth of Jews in the party and state apparatus», asserted Gomulka, but also gradually to decrease this percentage, especially in the upper ranks of the apparatus».95

Gomulka left Stalin and the Polish party in a difficult position. He counterposed his own patriotism and intimate ties with the Polish working people to the «national nihilism» of the party leaders, many of whom were Jews. In a period in which Stalin and the Soviet party raised the flag of the struggle against «cosmopolitanism», barely concealing its anti-Semitic content, the leaders of the Polish party were forced to walk a precarious tightrope between the «correct» struggle against cosmopolitanism, as part of the international class struggle, and the fight against Gomulka’s brand of patriotism and nationalism. For Jakub Berman, Roman Zambrowski, Hilary Minc, and the others, the acrobatics required considerable skill and patience.96 Meanwhile, Stalin was not at all pleased with Gomulka’s response to their December 9 meeting. In a note to party chief Boleslaw Bierut of December 16, he and Molotov suggested that Gomulka was hiding something and that his activities should be carefully monitored.97

How was it that Gomulka survived the coordinated attacks of Stalin and his Polish allies, when similar cases against Laszlo Rajk in Hungary and Rudolf Slánský in Czechoslovakia ended in show trials and executions? We know, for example, that Bierut sent Polish agents to Hungary to explore evidence from the Rajk case against Gomulka and his associates.98 Polish investigators were also involved in the interrogations that led up to the Slánský trial. There was great pressure on the Polish Ministry of State Security to concoct a case against Gomulka. Berman attributes the survival of Gomulka to the fact that the Polish leadership resisted Stalin’s injunctions to try him.99 Several of Gomulka’s recent biographers

95 Ibid., 275.
96 See Berman’s description of the Gomulka issue in T. Toranska, «Them»: Stalin’s Polish Puppets, trans. A. Kolakowska (New York, 1987), 281–284. Here Berman claims that Gomulka was attacked primarily because of his reluctance to criticize the Yugoslavs in the fall of 1947, after the first meeting of the Cominform.
98 Ibid., 527.
99 Berman states: «We[…] refused to allow Gomulka to be put on trial. We rejected all the charges against him. In this sense we were an exception, because we were the only ones who didn’t allow leading figures to be wrested out of the party leadership». Toranska, «Them», 327.
think that Stalin and the Polish party leadership were afraid that, unlike the others put on trial, Gomulka may well have defied his accusers and used the forum of a show trial to attack them. A better explanation may well lie in the fact that Gomulka was not Jewish while, for the most part, his accusers were. Slánský was of Jewish background as were almost all of Rajk’s close associates and co-defendants. They were therefore susceptible to the accusation of being cosmopolitans and agents of Zionism, more dangerous in Stalin’s mind than advocates of «nationalism». Given his consistent opposition to Jews in the party from the wartime period forward, it was impossible to accuse Gomulka of cosmopolitan sympathies.

How would it have looked for a party led by the trusted «Moscow» Poles (and Jews) Berman, Zambrowski, and Minc, to try and execute the unabashedly anti-Jewish Polish «home communist» Gomulka? As a consequence, Stalin and Bierut detained Gomulka and his wife, herself of Jewish background, in 1951, but left them in the relatively comfortable circumstances of house arrest.

10. Conclusions

The ongoing argument about the role of ideology in Soviet history sheds some light on the meaning of these cases for an overall evaluation of Stalin’s foreign policy in Europe after the war. This is an argument that began already in 1947, as George Kennan, among others, tried to assess the role of ideology in the making of Soviet foreign policy. Was Stalin primarily a Marxist-Leninist-Stalinist ideologue, determined to see Europe become communist and completely dependent on Moscow, as argued, in its extreme form, by Richard Raack and Martin Malia in one way and Robert Tucker in another? Or was he a clever realist, seeking to find accommodation with the West and ready to agree to reasonable spheres of influence. In his recent book on World War II, Gabriel Gorodetsky draws a portrait of Stalin as a thoroughgoing realist, while, for the postwar period, Marc Trachtenberg argues a similar case for both Stalin and Truman. Gorodetsky sees Stalin’s realism as deriving from the need to defend Russian national interests, while Trachtenberg sees thoroughgoing realism in the policies of both the Soviet Union and the United States, which – as Great Powers – were able to identify common interests in a mutally agreeable German and all-European settlement.

100 See, for example, Machcewicz, Władysław Gomulka, 32, and B. Szydek, ed., Władysław Gomułka we wspomnieniach (Lublin, 1989), 25.
102 Gorodetsky states: «Soviet policy remained essentially one of level-headed Realpolitik». G. Gorodetsky, Grand Delusions: Stalin and the German Invasion of Russia (New Haven/Conn., 1999), 7; Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace, 3–4. Given «power realities and both sides aversion to war», states Trachtenberg, it was likely that the USSR was going to conduct a reasonable policy.
Even if Stalin behaved as a realist, he saw the world through the eyes of ideology. His personal archives, now available in part in RGASPI, make it clear that the man was fully and completely absorbed with the meaning and functions of ideology. When it came to Marxism-Leninism, he was the self-appointed – also the widely recognized – Oracle of Delphi, and he took the job seriously. He edited, corrected, recast, and rewrote virtually all of the major documents relating to the central precepts of ideology in the postwar period, from textbooks on political economy to new editions of the *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (b)*, the famous *Short Course*. He rewrote and edited major political speeches by his deputies, policy articles for *Pravda*, and even programs for foreign communist parties, including the British. And he did this almost all the way until the end of his life.103 Ideology was a given, and it was the framework through which he worked and the lenses through which he saw the world. Yet, at the same time, his discussions with foreign leaders, communist and non-communist, are bereft of almost any ideological justifications or arguments. The same applies to his conversations with his close circle of communist lieutenants at home. Especially with fellow communists, the discussions are about hard-nosed, realistic, down-and-dirty politics. In a November 1947 meeting with Stalin, the French communist leader Thorez rambunctiously notes that though he is a Frenchman, in his soul he feels like a citizen of the Soviet Union. Stalin soberly replies: «we are all communists, and that says everything».104 By that he meant that there is a world of ideology, experience, realism, and fealty – encapsulated in the communist world and defined by its Moscow center, him – that is understood, combinable, and at the core of his thinking and therefore of theirs. In this sense, there is no difference between Russian and European communists.

Some historians who have studied Stalin’s goals for Europe in the newly opened archival materials, Eduard Mark, Donal O’Sullivan, and Leonid Gibianskii, to name some of the most recent, have concluded that Stalin developed his programs for anti-fascist fronts and peoples democratic governments as eyewash for the Anglo-Americans and as a sop to the electoral sensitivities of the peoples of Europe.105 The next stage, a fully Stalinist Europe, was the inevitable outcome of his political planning. Others, like Vojtech Mastny and Vladislav Zubok, believe that Stalin observed a much more pragmatic, spheres of influence policy regarding the spread of communism, one which sought from the beginning to nail down a belt of dependent countries on the Soviet European borders, while essentially turning over Western Europe and Greece to the «Anglo-Americans», as ostensibly

104 «I. V. Stalin i Moris Torez», 14.
agreed to during the war. Austria and Germany were special cases, related to the four-power tug-of-war in Europe. Mastny emphasizes Stalin’s fears and exaggerated needs for security as the motivating factors in constructing what became the «Soviet bloc». Zubok places the primary weight on what he and Constantine Pleshakov call the «revolutionary-imperial paradigm», which conforms to traditional Russian imperial proclivities. The Cold War was not intended by Stalin, says Mastny, but it was inevitable nonetheless. Zubok and Pleshakov emphasize Stalin’s lack of interest in conflict with the West: «the Cold War was not his [Stalin’s] choice or his brainchild».

Given the sources and outcomes of the conflicts described in the case studies above, the contemporary historiography of Stalin’s intentions does not fully capture the essence of European politics in the postwar period. In every case – whether Bornholm or the Berlin Blockade, the Gomułka-Stalin conflict, or the issues of Italy, Austria, and Albania – at least as decisive as other factors were European reactions to Soviet moves, as well as to American policies on the continent. One can make the argument, as William Hitchcock has done in his book about France, that much more was at work in determining the future of the continent than Stalin’s or for that matter Stalin’s and Truman’s intentions and ability to implement them. Strike movements, electoral struggles, street clashes, and the initiatives of political parties, personalities, and diplomats, both in the East and the West, have to be figured into the calculus of postwar European developments. The choices of Italian and Austrian voters at crucial intervals determined the fate of their countries and shaped Stalin’s foreign policies toward them. Danish politicians and diplomats (and the islanders of Bornholm itself) could well have jeopardized the future of the island had they behaved with less restraint. Huge crowds of Berliners unexpectedly rallied to the defense of the Western airlift and of their own freedom. In all of these cases, the outcomes seem much more obvious today than they did at the time, when events could have taken different trajectories.

Even in countries like Poland and Albania, where the demands of belonging to the incipient Soviet bloc placed limits on the influence of elections, rallies, or self-restraint, domestic European politics continued to change the course of events. Hoxha was an astute politician, able to use the Yugoslavs to his advantage before abandoning them in favor of being Stalin’s most loyal ally. As we know, Hoxha slyly shifted positions once again in the early 1960s, when he escaped the clutches of Moscow for the advantages of Beijing. Gomułka used the Jewish question in postwar Poland, manipulating party colleagues and, one could argue, Stalin himself, to defend his own positions connected with the «Polish road to socialism». Both

107 Zubok and Pleshakov, Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War, 276.
Hoxha and Gomulka survived Stalin to implement their own programs of socialist development in face of strong Soviet opposition.

European politics could play such an important role in part because Stalin's own policies on the continent were determined by his close reading of means and ends, which he claimed was the duty of every good Marxist. He was determined to avoid the kind of activity by the Soviet Union or its communist allies in Europe that would provoke British and American intervention. The Soviets returned Bornholm to Danish control when it became clear that maintaining the Soviet presence there might drive the Danes deeper into the hands of the British and gain nothing in return from a new regime in the Danish belts and sound. He resolutely abandoned the Berlin Blockade when it became apparent that the United States would neither back off from the formation of the West German state nor give up Berlin. Stalin insisted that Togliatti and the Italian radicals in the PCI adopt a conciliatory stance towards the «bourgeois» Italian government, convinced that the British and Americans would intervene if there was civil strife. Even when Togliatti begged for some sign of economic help on the eve of the April 1948 elections, Stalin worried that Soviet aid might be interpreted as outside intervention in internal Italian affairs. He might well have abandoned Albania altogether, as he did the Greek communists, if not for Hoxha’s clever manipulation of intra-bloc politics. If he could have found a face-saving way to sign a State Treaty on Austria in 1946, in 1949 or 1952, he might well have done so. He understood completely that under occupation the Austrians and the Austria state were more of a burden than a benefit to Soviet interests. Khrushchev’s views that the occupation did nothing but make the Soviets more unpopular among the Austrians was no doubt shared by Stalin. It is hard to know why Stalin did not sign a State Treaty; similarly we still do not know exactly why Stalin did not move to have Gomulka tried and executed. Poland remained an interesting paradox until the end of Soviet rule. The country that Moscow was most determined to dominate in the postwar world repeatedly defied its mandates and ended up destroying the edifice of communism altogether.
Stalin and Europe in the Postwar Period, 1945–1953: 
Issues and Problems

New documents from Russian archives make it possible to reassess Stalin's influence on Soviet foreign policy towards Europe after the end of the Second World War. There is no doubt that Stalin himself determined the contours of this policy. But there are also good reasons to assume that European activities and reactions to the outbreak of the Cold War contributed to the concrete solutions found on the continent. The domestic politics of the European states were as important as the complex relationship between Stalin and the local communist leaders in the East and West. European politics could play such a significant role because Stalin’s own policy was strongly determined by his love for Realpolitik in the post-war world. His marked acumen for means and ends reflected his understanding of Marxist ideology and Soviet interests.

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Staline et l’Europe d’après-guerre, 1945–1953: 
Questions centrales et problèmes

Des documents nouveaux en provenance des archives russes permettent de réévaluer le rôle de Staline dans la politique extérieure soviétique en Europe après la deuxième Guerre mondiale. Il n’y a plus de doute sur le fait que Staline en personne ait fixé les grandes lignes de cette politique. Mais il est également évident que les actions et les réactions européennes au début de la Guerre Froide ont contribué à façonner les solutions que trouvèrent les problèmes concrets du continent. Les politiques intérieures avaient leur poids, tout comme les relations complexes que Staline entretenait avec les leaders communistes locaux à l’Est et à l’Ouest. La politique européenne joua un rôle important (en raison de la prédilection de Staline) pour la «Realpolitik» dans les réalités d’après-guerre. L’attention particulière qu’il accordait à l’ajustement des moyens et les fins reflétait sa conception de l’idéologie marxiste et des intérêts soviétiques.

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