

eties under control. Each crisis that arose fed the next one, with the result that a divided Europe became a reality.

IRAN, TURKEY, THE MEDITERRANEAN—AND CONTAINMENT. Having already obtained the territorial concessions he wanted in Eastern Europe and Northeast Asia, Stalin's first priority after the war was to remove what he regarded as vulnerabilities in the south. One account describes him expressing satisfaction with a map showing the Soviet Union's new boundaries, but pointing to the Caucasus and complaining: "I don't like our border right here!"³¹ Three initiatives followed: Stalin delayed the withdrawal of Soviet troops from northern Iran, where they had been stationed since 1942 as part of an Anglo-Soviet arrangement to keep that country's oil supplies out of German hands. He demanded territorial concessions from Turkey as well as bases that would have given the U.S.S.R. effective control of the Turkish Straits. And he requested a role in the administration of former Italian colonies in North Africa with a view to securing one or more additional naval bases in the eastern Mediterranean.

It became clear almost at once, though, that Stalin had gone too far. "They won't allow it," his normally complaisant foreign minister Molotov warned, regarding the Straits. "Go ahead, press them for joint possession!" his irritated boss replied. "Demand it!"³² Molotov did, but he got nowhere. Truman and Attlee flatly rejected the Soviet bid for boundary adjustments at Turkey's expense, as well as for Turkish and Mediterranean naval bases. They surprised Stalin by taking the continued Soviet occupation of northern Iran to the United Nations Security Council early in 1946, in the first significant use of the new world organization to deal with an international crisis. Finding his military overstretched and his ambitions exposed, Stalin ordered a quiet withdrawal from Iran several months later. By that time, though, Truman had reinforced his own position by deploying the American Sixth Fleet—indeinitely—in the eastern Mediterranean. It was an unmistakable

signal that Stalin had reached the limit of what he could expect to achieve by invoking the tradition of wartime cooperation.³³

This new firmness in Washington coincided with a search for explanations of Soviet behavior: why had the Grand Alliance broken apart? What else did Stalin want? The best answer came from George F. Kennan, a respected but still junior Foreign Service officer serving in the American embassy in Moscow. In what he subsequently acknowledged was an "outrageous encumberment of the telegraphic process," Kennan responded to the latest in a long series of State Department queries with a hastily composed 8,000-word cable, dispatched on February 22, 1946. To say that it made an impact in Washington would be to put it mildly: Kennan's "long telegram" became the basis for United States strategy toward the Soviet Union throughout the rest of the Cold War.³⁴

Moscow's intransigence, Kennan insisted, resulted from nothing the West had done: instead it reflected the internal necessities of the Stalinist regime, and nothing the West could do within the foreseeable future would alter that fact. Soviet leaders *had* to treat the outside world as hostile because this provided the only excuse "for the dictatorship without which they did not know how to rule, for cruelties they did not dare not to inflict, for sacrifices they felt bound to demand." To expect concessions to be reciprocated was to be naïve: there would be no change in the Soviet Union's strategy until it encountered a sufficiently long string of failures to convince some future Kremlin leader—Kennan held out little hope that Stalin would ever see this—that his nation's behavior was not advancing its interests. War would not be necessary to produce this result. What would be needed, as Kennan put it in a published version of his argument the following year, was a "long-term, patient but firm and vigilant *containment* of Russian expansive tendencies."³⁵

Kennan could not have known at the time that one of his most careful readers was Stalin himself. Soviet intelligence quickly got ac-

cess to the "long telegram"—a relatively easy task because the document, though classified, was widely circulated.³⁶ Not to be outdone, Stalin ordered his ambassador in Washington, Nikolai Novikov, to prepare a "telegram" of his own, which he sent to Moscow on September 27, 1946. "The foreign policy of the United States," Novikov claimed, "reflects the imperialistic tendencies of American monopolistic capitalism, [and] is characterized . . . by a striving for world supremacy." As a consequence, the United States was increasing its military spending "colossally," establishing bases far beyond its borders, and had reached an agreement with Great Britain to divide the world into spheres of influence. But Anglo-American cooperation was "plagued with great internal contradictions and cannot be lasting. . . . It is quite possible that the Near East will become a center of Anglo-American contradictions that will explode the agreements now reached between the United States and England."³⁷

Novikov's assessment—which reflected Stalin's thinking and which Molotov himself ghost-authored³⁸—may well account for the relaxed self-confidence with which the Kremlin leader received Truman's recently appointed secretary of state, George C. Marshall, when the American, British, French, and Soviet foreign ministers met in Moscow in April, 1947. It had long been Stalin's habit, while hosting important visitors, to doodle wolves' heads on a pad in red pencil, and this he did as he assured Marshall that the failure to settle the future of postwar Europe was no great problem: there was no urgency. Marshall, the quiet, laconic, but shrewd former general who more than anyone else had shaped American military strategy during World War II, was not reassured. "All the way back to Washington," an aide later recalled, he talked "of the importance of finding some initiative to prevent the complete breakdown of Western Europe."³⁹

THE TRUMAN DOCTRINE AND THE MARSHALL PLAN. Had Stalin been as attentive to intelligence reports on the foreign ministers' conference as he was to those on the atomic bomb and the Ken-

nan "long telegram," he might have anticipated what was about to happen. Marshall and his British and French counterparts spent many hours in Moscow—when not in fruitless meetings with Molotov—discussing the need for cooperation in the reconstruction of Europe. The rooms in which they did so were no doubt bugged. And yet, ideology overrode eavesdropping in Stalin's mind. Had not Lenin shown that capitalists could never cooperate for very long? Had not Novikov's "telegram" confirmed this? The Kremlin boss had his reasons to be self-confident.

They were not, however, good ones. Truman had already announced, on March 12, 1947, a program of military and economic assistance to Greece and Turkey, occasioned by the British government's unexpected announcement, just two weeks earlier, that it could no longer bear the costs of supporting those countries. He had done so in strikingly broad terms, insisting that it now "must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures. . . . [W]e must assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way."⁴⁰ Stalin paid little attention to Truman's speech, although he did take time that spring to insist that a recently published history of philosophy be rewritten to minimize the deference it had shown to the West.⁴¹

While Stalin was undertaking that task, Marshall—following Truman's lead—was constructing a Cold War grand strategy. Kennan's "long telegram" had identified the problem: the Soviet Union's internally driven hostility toward the outside world. It had, however, suggested no solution. Now Marshall told Kennan to come up with one: the only guideline was "avoid trivia."⁴² The instruction, it is fair to say, was met. The European Recovery Program, which Marshall announced in June, 1947, committed the United States to nothing less than the reconstruction of Europe. The Marshall Plan, as it instantly came to be known, did not at that point distinguish between those parts of the continent that were under Soviet control and those that were not—but the thinking that lay behind it certainly did.

Several premises shaped the Marshall Plan: that the gravest threat to western interests in Europe was not the prospect of Soviet military intervention, but rather the risk that hunger, poverty, and despair might cause Europeans to vote their own communists into office, who would then obediently serve Moscow's wishes; that American economic assistance would produce immediate psychological benefits and later material ones that would reverse this trend; that the Soviet Union would not itself accept such aid or allow its satellites to, thereby straining its relationship with them; and that the United States could then seize both the geopolitical and the moral initiative in the emerging Cold War.

Stalin fell into the trap the Marshall Plan laid for him, which was to get *him* to build the wall that would divide Europe. Caught off guard by Marshall's proposal, he sent a large delegation to Paris to discuss Soviet participation, then withdrew it while allowing the East Europeans to stay, then forbade them—most dramatically the Czechs, whose leaders were flown to Moscow to get the word—from receiving such assistance.⁴³ It was an unusually uneven performance from the normally self-confident Kremlin dictator, and it suggested the extent to which the strategy of containment, with the Marshall Plan at its center, was already disrupting his own set of priorities. Further revisions of philosophy texts would have to wait.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, YUGOSLAVIA, AND THE BERLIN BLOCKADE.

Stalin responded to the Marshall Plan just as Kennan had predicted he would: by tightening his grip wherever he could. In September, 1947, he announced the formation of the Cominform, a latter-day version of the old prewar Comintern, whose task had been to enforce orthodoxy within the international communist movement. "Don't start throwing your weight around," Andrei Zhdanov, Stalin's spokesman within the new organization, told a protesting Pole. "In Moscow we know better how to apply Marxism-Leninism."⁴⁴ What that meant became clear in February, 1948, when Stalin approved a plan by Czechoslovak commu-

nists to seize power in the only Eastern European state that had retained a democratic government. Shortly after the coup, the broken body of Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk—the son of Thomas Masaryk, the founder of the country after World War I—was discovered in a Prague courtyard: whether he jumped or was pushed has never been established.⁴⁵ It made little difference, though, because the prospects for *any* independence within Stalin's sphere of influence, it appeared, had perished with Masaryk.

Not all communists, however, fell within that sphere. Yugoslavia had been one of the Soviet Union's most reliable allies since the end of World War II, but its leader, Josip Broz Tito, had come to power on his own. He and his partisans, not the Red Army, had driven the Nazis out; unlike any of his other East European counterparts, Tito did not depend upon Stalin's support to remain in power. Efforts to subject him to Cominform orthodoxy caused Tito to bristle, and by the end of June, 1948, he had openly broken with Moscow. Stalin professed not to be worried. "I will shake my little finger, and there will be no more Tito."⁴⁶ Much more than a finger shook within the Soviet Union and the international communist movement over this first act of defiance by a communist against the Kremlin, but Tito survived—and was soon receiving economic assistance from the United States. The Yugoslav dictator might be a "son-of-a-bitch," the new American secretary of state, Dean Acheson, acknowledged astringently in 1949, but he was now "our son-of-a-bitch."⁴⁷

Meanwhile, Stalin had undertaken an even less promising venture: a blockade of Berlin. His reasons, even now, are not clear. He may have hoped to force the Americans, British, and French out of their respective sectors of the divided city, taking advantage of their dependence on supply lines running through the Soviet occupation zone. Or he may have sought to slow their efforts to consolidate their own zones, which seemed likely to produce a powerful west German state within which Moscow would have no influence. Whatever its purposes, Stalin's blockade backfired as badly as his attempt to discipline Tito. The west-

ern allies improvised an airlift for the beleaguered city, thereby winning the emphatic gratitude of the Berliners, the respect of most Germans, and a global public relations triumph that made Stalin look both brutal and incompetent. "Scoundrels," the old man noted defensively, on a diplomatic dispatch reporting these developments. "It is all lies. . . . It is not a blockade, but a defensive measure."⁴⁸

Defensive it may have been, but the offensive character of this and the other measures Stalin took in response to the Marshall Plan wound up increasing, not decreasing, the Soviet Union's security problems. The Czech coup persuaded the Congress of the United States—which had not yet approved Truman's program for European recovery—to do so quickly. The events in Prague, together with the Berlin blockade, convinced the European recipients of American economic assistance that they needed military protection as well: that led them to request the creation of a North Atlantic Treaty Organization, which committed the United States for the first time ever to the peacetime defense of Western Europe. By the time Stalin grudgingly lifted the Berlin blockade in May, 1949, the North Atlantic Treaty had been signed in Washington and the Federal Republic of Germany had been proclaimed in Bonn—another result that Stalin had not wanted. Tito's heresy remained unpunished, thereby demonstrating that it was possible for communists themselves to achieve a degree of independence from Moscow. And there were no signs whatever of the disagreements among capitalists—or of the Anglo-American war—that Stalin's ideological illusions had led him to expect. His strategy for gaining control of postwar Europe lay in ruins, and he had largely himself to blame.

VI.

OR SO IT appears in retrospect. It did not seem so, however, at the time. Instead the years 1949–50 saw a series of *apparent* setbacks to the West, none of which was substantial enough to reverse the process by

which the United States and its allies had seized the initiative in Europe, where it really counted. Those who lived through these events, however, had no way of knowing this: to them, it looked as though the European victories the West had won had been outweighed by an unexpected expansion of the Cold War, almost simultaneously, onto several broader fronts—in none of which the prospects seemed favorable.

The first of these lay within the realm of military technology. The Americans had expected their monopoly over the atomic bomb to last for some six to eight years: hence, the Red Army's disproportionate conventional force advantage in Europe had not greatly worried them. "As long as we can outproduce the world, can control the sea and can strike inland with the atomic bomb," Secretary of Defense James Forrestal observed late in 1947, "we can assume certain risks otherwise unacceptable."⁴⁹ The fundamental premise of the Marshall Plan had been that the United States could safely concentrate on European economic reconstruction, while deferring any significant military buildup that would match Soviet capabilities. The bomb would deter the Russians while the Americans revived—and reassured—the Europeans.

But on August 29, 1949, the Soviet Union got its own bomb. Stalin authorized no public announcement of the successful test, which took place in the Kazakhstan desert, but within days airborne sampling flights the Americans had only recently begun flying began detecting radioactive fallout—an unmistakable indicator that an atomic bomb had exploded in Soviet territory. Surprised that this had happened so soon but fearing leaks if he tried to suppress the evidence, Truman himself revealed the existence of the first Soviet nuclear weapon on September 23rd. The Kremlin then confirmed it.

The implications, for the Americans, were daunting. Without its atomic monopoly, the Truman administration would have to consider upgrading conventional forces, possibly even stationing some of them permanently in Europe, a contingency not provided for in the North Atlantic Treaty. It would have to build more atomic bombs if it was to maintain a quantitative and qualitative lead over the U.S.S.R. And it

found itself pondering a third and more draconian option, the existence of which American scientists revealed to Truman only at this moment: attempting to build what was then called a "super-bomb"—a thermonuclear or "hydrogen" bomb, in today's terminology—that would be at least a thousand times more powerful than the weapons that had devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

In the end, Truman approved all three alternatives. He quietly authorized an accelerated production of atomic bombs: at the time of the Soviet test, the United States had fewer than 200 in its arsenal, not enough, a Pentagon study had pointed out, to be sure of defeating the Soviet Union if a real war came.⁵⁰ He then announced, on January 31, 1950, that the United States would go ahead with the "super-bomb" project. The option Truman resisted the longest was a buildup in American conventional forces, chiefly because of its cost. Producing more atomic bombs, even hydrogen bombs, would still be cheaper than what it would take to bring the army, navy, and air force back to anything approximating World War II levels. Truman, who had hoped for a "peace dividend" that would allow him to balance the federal budget after years of deficits, had taken a major risk with the Marshall Plan, which committed the United States to invest almost 10 percent of annual government expenditures in the reconstruction of Europe. Clearly something—fiscal solvency, an upgraded military, the revival of Europe—was going to have to give: it would not be possible to meet all of those priorities and still cope with the new insecurities created by the Soviet atomic breakthrough.

A second but simultaneous expansion of the Cold War occurred in East Asia, where on October 1, 1949—a week after Truman's announcement of the Soviet atomic bomb—a victorious Mao Zedong proclaimed the formation of the People's Republic of China. The celebration he staged in Beijing's Tiananmen Square marked the end of a civil war between the Chinese nationalists and the Chinese communists that had been going on for almost a quarter of a century. Mao's triumph surprised both Truman and Stalin: they had assumed that the

nationalists, under their long-time leader Chiang Kai-shek, would continue to run China after World War II. Neither had anticipated the possibility that, within four years of Japan's surrender, the nationalists would be fleeing to the island of Taiwan, and the communists would be preparing to govern the most populous nation in the world.

Did this mean that China would now become a Soviet satellite? Impressed by what had happened in Yugoslavia, Truman and his advisers thought not. "Moscow faces a considerable task in seeking to bring the Chinese Communists under its complete control," a State Department analysis concluded late in 1948, "if for no other reason than that Mao Tse-tung has been entrenched in power for nearly ten times the length of time that Tito has."⁵¹ Both Mao and Tito had long dominated their respective communist parties, both had led them to victory in civil wars that had overlapped a world war, both had achieved their victories without the Soviet Union's help. Mindful of the unexpected advantages Tito's break with Stalin had provided, American officials consoled themselves with the argument that the "loss" of China to communism would not amount to a "gain" for the Soviet Union. Mao, they thought, might well turn out to be the "Asian Tito": hence, the administration made no commitment to the defense of Taiwan, despite the fact that the powerful pro-Chiang "China Lobby" in Congress was demanding that it do so. The United States, as Secretary of State Acheson put it, would simply "wait until the dust settles."⁵²

The comment was unwise because Mao had no intention of following Tito's example. Despite having built his own movement with little help from Moscow, the new Chinese leader was a dedicated Marxist-Leninist who was more than ready to defer to Stalin as the head of the international communist movement. The new China, he announced in June, 1949, must ally "with the Soviet Union, . . . and with the proletariat and broad masses of the people in all other countries, and form an international united front. . . . We must lean to one side."⁵³

Mao's reasons had to do first with ideology: Marxism-Leninism gave him a way to link his revolution with the one he regarded as the