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## Revolution by Degrees

### Stalin's National-Front Strategy for Europe, 1941-1947

by  
**Eduard Mark**

### Working Paper No. 31

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## PROLEGOMENON<sup>1</sup>

The question of whether Iosif Stalin had a comprehensive political strategy for Europe during World War II cuts to the heart of persistent debates about his conduct of Soviet foreign policy. An answer to this elemental question would establish whether he approached foreign affairs deliberately and comprehensively or whether his policy was essentially ad hoc. And if it could be shown that the Soviet leader did pursue a conscious strategy, it is reasonable to suppose that analysis of it would reveal something about his motives and purposes, both of which scholars have construed in the most varied ways imaginable. An understanding of when any such strategy was implemented, moreover, might settle one of the most fundamental questions of all regarding the origins of the Cold War: Was the sovietization of Eastern Europe a response to Western initiatives and local considerations, or did the Kremlin intend it from the first?

A steady stream of revelations from the archives of Russia and Eastern Europe has called longstanding interpretations of Stalin's foreign policy into question. Amid the flux, new hypotheses

have been slow to form. There is, however, an emergent tendency to view Soviet foreign policy during World War II and the early Cold War as largely reactive and opportunistic. Writers see strategic inclinations on Stalin's part, to be sure, but many now doubt that the architect of the world's first planned economy approached foreign policy in a particularly deliberate way. Corollary doubts that Stalin was greatly interested in spreading communism for its own sake have also been raised. One scholar has even asserted that "*nowhere* beyond what Moscow

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<sup>1</sup>I wish to express my gratitude to General de Corp de Armată Dumitru Cioflină, formerly chief of staff of the Romanian Army, for giving me access to the records of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party while they were in the custody of the Romanian Army before their subsequent transfer to the Romanian State Archives. I am also grateful to Lieutenant Colonels Alexandru Oșca and Mircea Chirițoiu for guiding me through the records. I should also like to thank Drs. Radu Ioanid and Marietta Stankova for checking my translations from the Romanian and Bulgarian languages. For their comments on the draft of this paper I am grateful to Geoffrey Roberts, William Stueck, Robert C. Tucker, Odd Arne Westad and Vladislav Zubok.

considered the Soviet borders did it policies foresee the establishment of Communist regimes.”<sup>2</sup>

The present essay offers a very different view of Stalin’s policy toward Europe. Its findings derive chiefly from fresh evidence about a previously obscure dimension of Soviet policy during World War II and the early Cold War: the Kremlin’s direction of the communist parties of Europe.

In recent years, materials on this subject have become available in Russia and Eastern Europe. The British government, moreover, has only recently revealed that it intercepted Moscow’s instructions to the European communist parties from mid-1943 through 1945.<sup>3</sup> The new evidence shows that:

(1) The international policy of the Soviet state encompassed more than the actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Ministerstvo Inostrannykh Del, MID*), the Red Army, and the other public instrumentalities of the Soviet state. Specifically, the newly available information establishes that the dissolution of the Comintern in May 1943 was entirely a deception. As the Russian editors of an exceptionally valuable collection of documents relating to the work of the Comintern and its successor note, “It is obvious that the activity the Comintern conducted until May 1943 was not only not broken off thereafter but became still more extensive.”<sup>4</sup> Interpretations of Soviet foreign policy must now take this fact fully into consideration.

(2) The activities and directives of the Comintern and its successor, the Department of International Information (*Otdel Myezhdunarodnoi Informatzii, OMI*), taken in concert with the public actions of the Soviet government and the private utterances of Stalin and other prominent Communists show that Stalin had a highly developed political strategy for liberated countries throughout Europe. During World War II, as several of the Kremlin’s directives to the national parties indicated at the time, the strategy was to be realized through the establishment of national fronts somewhat resembling the so-called popular fronts pushed by the Kremlin in the 1930s.

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<sup>2</sup>Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21. (Emphasis added) See also Melvyn Leffler’s useful review of recent literature on the origins of the Cold War. “The Cold War: What Do ‘We Now Know,’” in *The American Historical Review*, 104 (April 1999), esp. 508, 511-12.

<sup>3</sup> The codename for this program was ISCOT. Some messages are cited below.

<sup>4</sup> Institute of General History, Russian Academy of Sciences, *Komintern i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina, 2, Posle 22 Iyunia 1941 g.* (Moscow: Pamyatniki Istoricheskoi Myicli, 1998), 89.

(3) In Eastern Europe, where the strategy became known after the war as *Narodniya demokratiya* (Popular Democracy), the intent was to leverage the power of the small communist parties through the creation of broad communist-dominated coalitions that outwardly observed the conventions of “bourgeois democracy.” The purposes of this tactic were (a) to divide or otherwise render ineffective local opposition; (b) to create centers of political attraction which would consolidate popular support through programs of reform and recovery; and (c) to minimize Western objections to the creeping establishment of regimes dominated by communists and directly subject to Moscow lest the USSR be drawn into dangerously premature conflict with its allies and forfeit the substantial advantages to be gained from continued association with them.

(4) Beyond the reach of the Red Army and the NKVD the object of the national-front strategy was in the shorter term to consolidate the war-enhanced political positions of communist parties by establishing them as responsible parties of good government committed to “bourgeois democracy” and cooperation with other parties of the Left. The purpose was to create the capacity to exploit future opportunities for political advances while (as in Eastern Europe) avoiding premature conflict with the United States and Great Britain.

(5) To ask whether Stalin pursued communist revolution in Europe *or* continued cooperation with his allies is to pose a false antinomy. He wanted *both*, and the strategy of the national front was the vehicle for temporarily harmonizing goals that were ultimately in conflict. Stalin did not adopt this course merely because he wished to avoid the adverse consequences of an early break with the Western powers: He *needed* the United States and Britain if he was to achieve, in the shorter term, certain important goals of his foreign policy.

(6) Stalin’s program took shape sufficiently early in the war that it cannot be construed as a defensive response to Western pressures on the Soviet Union in regard to Eastern Europe, for at the time of its inception the policies of both the United States and Great Britain toward the region deferred to Soviet predominance. Neither was the program for the ultimate sovietization of Eastern Europe a response to the putatively “anti-Soviet” sentiments of the peoples of Eastern Europe. On the contrary, the national-front strategy supposed that the communist-dominated regimes could win wide support and even establish

themselves through free elections.

## STALIN AND THE GRAND ALLIANCE

Disagreement first arose between the Soviet Union and its Western allies during Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden's visit to Moscow in December 1941. The cause was Moscow's demand that Britain recognize the USSR's borders as they had stood on 22 June 1941—that is, that the British accept the Soviet Union's forcible incorporation of eastern Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Northern Bukovina, and Bessarabia.<sup>5</sup> Left to their own, the British would have conceded willingly enough, but they were bound by a prior pledge to the United States not to enter into agreements about the postwar frontiers. While all this is familiar, it is worth revisiting in light of new information which shows that from a point early in the war Stalin valued his Western connections and planned to preserve them in the postwar period.

At the time of Eden's journey to Moscow, neither Britain nor the United States had formulated plans for postwar Europe. There existed only the gauzy generalities of the Atlantic Charter. Eden discovered to his surprise that Stalin's ideas on the particularities of postwar Europe were "starkly definite."<sup>6</sup> Reading from a paper that evidenced extensive preparation, Stalin called for two treaties between the USSR and Britain. One was to be a pact of mutual military assistance, the other an agreement with a secret protocol to settle comprehensively the affairs of postwar Europe. Poland was to slide east at Germany's expense; Czechoslovakia was to gain the Sudetenland and part of Hungary; Yugoslavia was to be given part of Italy; Albania

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<sup>5</sup> Moscow at first made an exception of Eastern Poland in deference to British sensibilities, but ultimately added it to the list.

<sup>6</sup> Eden was taken aback not only by the comprehensiveness of Stalin's proposal but by its character of unabashed *Realpolitik*. He had himself passed to Stalin before the meeting a draft agreement of a very different character. Insofar as it dealt with postwar Europe, it would have pledged the signatories to the principles of the Atlantic Charter, to maintain peace, to work jointly for the reconstruction of the continent, to seek no territorial aggrandizement, and to refrain from interference in the internal affairs of other peoples. Anthony Eden, *The Reckoning* (London: Cassell, 1965). 335; War Cabinet, W. P. (42) S, 5 January 1942, "Mr. Eden's Visit to Moscow," document 2, Eden/Stalin meeting of 16 December 1941," Public Records Office (PRO, Kew, Richmond-Upon-Thames, U.K.), CAB 66/220; "Memorandum by Secretary of State on Conversations with M. Stalin, December 12-20, 1941)," *ibid.*, and Annex I, "Draft Agreement." 16 December 1941.



and Austria should have their independence restored, with guarantees; Turkey was to have the Dodecanese Islands and possibly northern Syria; Greece and all other occupied countries (including Austria) should retain their prewar frontiers; Germany was to lose the Rhineland and perhaps Bavaria; the Soviet Union was to retain the territories it had seized during 1939-1940; Romania, which was to regain Transylvania, would have to accept a military treaty with the USSR which, while guaranteeing her against Hungary, would establish Soviet military and naval bases on her soil; Finland, too, would have to accept Soviet bases, and Bulgaria would lose certain districts to Turkey. Britain, for her part, should have bases in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark.<sup>7</sup> When Stalin had finished reading his paper, he added that he was also interested in Eden's views on reparations from Germany and her satellites; he also wished to hear Britain's views on the maintenance of peace and security in postwar Europe. There should be, he thought, some sort of alliance of democratic states with a military force at its disposal. He added that he would have no objection if certain unnamed European states wished to federate.<sup>8</sup> The next day, Stalin explained that he would not agree to an Anglo-Soviet treaty unless Britain recognized the USSR's frontiers of June 1941.<sup>9</sup>

This program for the territorial reordering of Europe naturally evolved as the war developed and conditions changed.<sup>10</sup> The larger part of it remained in place, however, and in the

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<sup>7</sup> Eden, *The Reckoning*, 335; War Cabinet, W. P. (42) S, 5 January 1942, "Mr. Eden's Visit to Moscow," document 2, Eden/Stalin meeting of 16 December 1941, PRO, CAB 66/220. Stalin had raised the issue of a comprehensive political understanding between Britain and the USSR as early as July 1941. Chary of diplomatic complications, London agreed only to an "agreement for joint action" of 12 July 1941 that pledged mutual support in the war against Germany and forbade negotiations with Germany except by common agreement. Stalin raised the issue of political agreement in September. The War Cabinet paid little heed to the suggestion until a display of ill temper on Stalin's part induced it to send Eden to Moscow. Cordell Hull to Franklin D. Roosevelt, 4 February 1942, enclosing memorandum, 4 February 1943, subj: "British-Soviet Negotiations. . .", *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942*, 5 (Washington, D. C.: Department of State, 1961), 504-06.

<sup>8</sup> Stalin/Eden meeting of 16 December 1941.

<sup>9</sup> "Mr. Eden's trip to Moscow," document 3, Stalin/Eden meeting of 17 December 1941.

<sup>10</sup> Soviet policy, for example, turned notably anti-Turkish and pro-Bulgarian during the war -- just the reverse of what had been the case in 1941. Bases in Romania lost their importance when it became clear that the Red Army would occupy the country and dispose of its political affairs as Moscow wished. Support for the division of Germany went by the board when it became apparent that whoever supported the proposal would almost certainly lose by the default the postwar political struggle for Germany. Presumably the USSR lost interest in the

main Moscow achieved its abiding aims.<sup>11</sup> This, with the detailed presentation of a postwar settlement so early in the war, suffices to establish that Stalin was not disposed to wait on events, but rather tried to anticipate them.

For present purposes, the most significant aspect of Stalin's extensive presentation to Eden was his evident interest in an alliance with Britain to settle the political affairs of postwar Europe, and the related suggestion that there should be an association of democratic powers to keep the peace. That Stalin did not raise these ideas merely for their effect on Eden is evident from cables he directed to his foreign minister, V. M. Molotov, during the latter's trips to London and Washington in May 1942.

Molotov stopped in London to conclude negotiations for an Anglo-Soviet treaty before going on to Washington in response to an invitation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt to discuss the opening of a second front in Europe. From 21 May through 26 May Eden and Molotov haggled over the treaty. The latter took the position that his government would not sign the treaty unless it recognized the Soviet Union's frontiers of June 1941, except for certain modifications in Poland's favor. Eden responded that Britain could not accept the Soviet demand because of the prior agreement with the Americans, who were opposed to the Soviet demands. As the deadlock had been entirely foreseeable, Eden had prepared a draft instrument that made no mention of frontiers but did offer Moscow a postwar military alliance against Germany for a term of twenty years. On 23 May Eden put it before Molotov, who evinced little interest but agreed to stay in London a while longer to discuss it. On 24 May Molotov spoke with the American ambassador in London, John G. Winant, who confirmed his government's opposition to the USSR's territorial demands. The American position, Molotov said, was reason for "serious

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aggrandizement of Greece when that country emerged from the war as a protégé of Britain and opponent of Bulgaria.

<sup>11</sup> For example: The demand for the frontiers of 1941, the search for treaty relations with Britain, the proposed territorial settlements involving Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Italy, and Yugoslavia, and the restoration of Albania. The one signal failure was of course the attempt to transfer Italian territory (Trieste) to Yugoslavia.

consideration.” He indicated that he might accept Eden’s second draft, but wanted to speak with Roosevelt first. The next day Molotov reiterated this position to Eden, stressing American opposition to an agreement on frontiers, and, on 26 May, he accepted Eden’s second draft with but minor changes.<sup>12</sup>

This sequence of events has suggested to many writers that the Soviets dropped their demand for recognition of their frontiers of 1941 because of American opposition. Molotov, about to fly to Washington to discuss the opening of a second front with Roosevelt, probably wanted to convey this impression in order to create a sense of obligation on the President’s part. But, in fact, American opposition had nothing to do with Molotov’s announcement of 26 May that his government would accept Eden’s second draft. For on the evening of 24 May, before Molotov had even informed Moscow that he would meet with Winant, Stalin wired Molotov that Eden’s second draft was not merely satisfactory but “an important document.” It did not, to be sure, deal with the question of borders, but that was of no consequence “since our hands remain free. The question of borders . . . we will decide by force.” Satisfied with the prospective alliance with Britain, Stalin now instructed Molotov to sign the treaty as soon as possible and to depart for Washington.<sup>13</sup> The unavoidable conclusion is that the alliance, which Eden regarded as consolation prize for his government’s refusal to recognize the Soviet frontiers of 1941, was in fact an important objective of Stalin’s. The next day, Stalin informed Molotov that he hoped the United States would adhere to the pact, though he did not want Molotov to hint at that lest the British interpret the cue as “disparagement of their role.”<sup>14</sup>

There was soon even more compelling evidence of the importance Stalin attached to a postwar association with the United States and Britain. During his first meeting with Molotov,

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<sup>12</sup> Lloyd C. Gardner, *Spheres of Influence: the Great Powers Partition Europe from Munich to Yalta* (Chicago: Ivan Dee, 1993) 137-39.

<sup>13</sup> Document 39, cable, Stalin to Molotov, 24 May 1942, in O. A. Rzheshesvsky, *Voyna i Diplomatiya: Dokumenty, Kommentarii (1941-1942)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 118.

<sup>14</sup> Document 58, cable, Stalin to Molotov, 25 May 1942, *ibid.*, 141.

on 29 May, Roosevelt expanded on his conception of the postwar world: Four Policemen—the United States, Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and China, which virtually alone among the nations of the world should have significant military establishments, would enforce the peace. This was all very interesting, Molotov replied coolly before promptly changing the subject.<sup>15</sup> Stalin, however, commented on Roosevelt’s proposal with unabashed enthusiasm: “Roosevelt’s statements on preserving peace after the war are absolutely correct. One cannot doubt that without the creation of an association of the armed forces of England, the USA [and] the USSR able to forestall aggression, it will not be possible to preserve peace in the future.”<sup>16</sup> Stalin expressed essentially the same idea publicly on 6 November 1944. The Grand Alliance arose not from “accidental or transitory motives, but vitally important and long-lasting interests,” foremost among which was “preventing new aggression or a new war, if not forever, then at least for an extended period of time.”<sup>17</sup> Given Stalin’s position, formulated so early and repeated so clearly, it is hardly surprising that in their disquisitions on the USSR’s postwar foreign policy Soviet diplomats treated “the notion of a great power concert as the most desirable postwar arrangement . . .” or that Molotov should later recall, “It was to our advantage to preserve the alliance with America. That was important.”<sup>18</sup>

Historians of the Cold War, by and large, have had some difficulty grasping that Stalin’s policy toward his allies, both during World War II and for some time thereafter, combined collaboration with aggrandizement. The tendency has been to seize upon one or the other and to take it for the whole—either collaboration *or* aggrandizement. Both, however, were closely

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<sup>15</sup> Memorandum of conversation by Samuel Cross, 29 May 1942, *FRUS, 1942*, 3:568-69; Document 96, memorandum of conversation, 29 May 1942, *Sovyetsko-amerikanskiye Otnosheniya vo Vremya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiniy*, 1: 175-78.

<sup>16</sup> Document No. 84, Unsigned cable (but Stalin’s) to Molotov, 1 June 1942, in O. A. Rzheshesky, *Voina i Diplomatiya: Dokumenty, Kommentarii (1941-1942)* (Moscow: Nauka, 1997), 192.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Vladimir O. Pechatnov, “The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post War Relations with the United States and Great Britain,” Cold War International History Project, Working Paper No. 13 (July 1995)

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.; Felix Chuyev, *Sto Sorok Besed c Molotovim* (Moscow: Terra, 1991), 76 (entry of 15 August 1975),

intertwined because Stalin's imperial ambitions and his desire to preserve the alliance were different aspects of a single policy. The wartime coalition was not an impediment to his ambitions, to be lightly discarded when he no longer needed Western aid against Germany. On the contrary, continued alliance with the Anglo-Americans was an essential condition for achieving even his expansionist ends in full measure.

Two of the reasons for the high value Stalin placed on his Western connections are obvious: at the war's end, the USSR would be in no condition for an early trial of strength with the Anglo-Americans, from whom, moreover, the Kremlin wanted various forms of economic aid. Other reasons were more subtle, but they too figured importantly in Soviet calculations. There was, first, a defensive consideration: The Soviets believed that in both Britain and America they faced an impressive array of enemies. Alliance would complicate the efforts of these forces to work against the USSR.<sup>19</sup> Other reasons for valuing the Grand Alliance, more enduring if not more important than those already mentioned, arose from Stalin's ambitions. Throughout the war, Stalin had subtly tried to play the Americans and British against each other; he continued to try to do the same in the immediate postwar period, when he and other Soviet officials confidently expected imperialistic rivalries between Great Britain and the United States to intensify. But the USSR could not readily play upon the contradictions of the capitalist world if open enmity replaced the alliance between East and West, for then the British and the Americans might unite against the Soviet Union as they had against Germany.<sup>20</sup> At the Teheran

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, the long list of the USSR's American enemies provided by Ambassador Konstantin Oumanskii in a cable of 22 June 1941: *Sovyetsko-amerikanskiye Otnosheniya vo Vremya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiniy, 1941-1945*. 1, 1941-1943 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1984), 42-44. Soviet diplomats reporting from the United States commonly referred to "Roosevelt and his faction" or the "Rooseveltians," conveying the impression that they perceived the President as embattled within his own government because of his positive stance towards the USSR.

<sup>20</sup> For Anglo-American capitalist contradictions as a theme in Soviet wartime thinking, see Pechatnov, "The Big Three After World War II," 4-5, 13. In May 1943 the Soviet ambassador in Britain proposed to the former Under Secretary of State R. A. Butler that their two governments should regard their treaty of alliance as aimed chiefly at the United States which, he observed, was becoming an imperialist power dangerous to both. What is perhaps most interesting about this suggestion are the observations of Butler and several commenting officials was that there was nothing at all new in it! Memorandum and enclosure, R. A. Butler to Anthony Eden, 2 June 1943, PRO, FO 371/36983/N 3547. For background on Soviet attempts to exploit capitalist contradictions, see William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War* (Ithaca, New York and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 42-43, 65-75.

Conference (28 November 28-1December 1943), Roosevelt, moreover, led Stalin to expect the early withdrawal of American forces from Europe, and that development, which Stalin greatly desired, could hardly be advanced by an early onset of tensions with his two Western allies.<sup>21</sup> Some of the Soviet leader's ambitions—participation in the occupation of Japan, a North African trusteeship, and revision of the Montreux Convention—could be realized only through continued association with the United States and Britain.<sup>22</sup> Similarly, Stalin's desire for reparations from the western zones of occupation in Germany and a say in the administration of industry there self-evidently required continued amity.<sup>23</sup>

#### THE POPULAR FRONT REDUX

For many reasons, then, it was apparent to the Soviet leadership from a point early in the war that the continuance of the Grand Alliance for a certain period in the peace to follow was very much in its interest. This desideratum, however, was immanently in conflict with another: the extension of Soviet influence over (at a minimum) Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Roosevelt had sold the war to the American public as a crusade for the liberal democratic values expressed in the Atlantic Charter and had induced his allies to endorse his program. Stalin, moreover, as a Marxist-Leninist, could hardly doubt that the capitalist powers would take fright if socialism seized possession of half of Europe. He had, therefore, every reason to suspect that if he followed in Eastern Europe and the Balkans anything like the program he had applied to the Baltic states, Eastern Poland, Bessarabia, and Bukovina during 1939-41—immediate

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<sup>21</sup> One of Stalin's reasons for opposing the treaty of demilitarization for Germany proposed by Secretary of State James F. Byrnes at the London Conference of Foreign Ministers in September 1945 was that it might keep the United States engaged in Europe. Vladimir O. Pechatnov, "The Allies Are Pressing On You To Break Your Will. . .": Foreign Policy Correspondence Between Stalin and Molotov And Other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946," Working Paper No. 26 of the Cold War International History Project, 11.

<sup>22</sup> For Stalin's strong interest in participating in the occupation of Japan and in obtaining a trusteeship, see Pechatnov, "The Allies Are Pressing On You To Break Your Will. . .," 5-7, 11-13, 34.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of this point see Wilfried Loth, "Stalin's Plans for Post-War Germany," in Francesca Gori and Silvio Pons, *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), 26.

revolution through massacre and deportation—there would follow in the West so sharp a reaction that even Roosevelt could not breast the tide.<sup>24</sup> So much, then, for the alliance. A change of strategy was clearly in order.

But how to maintain the alliance while spreading Soviet influence throughout Europe and laying the groundwork for the Continent's ultimate sovietization? The answer was at hand in recent historical experience—the Popular Front of the 1930s, to which Stalin repaired on the very day of the German attack on his country. On 22 June 1941, he ordered the Comintern, which he now wanted to operate more discreetly than it had, not to raise the issue of socialist revolution but rather to stress the common threat of fascism to the peoples of the world.<sup>25</sup> In addressing the secretariat of the Comintern on the evening of 22 June, the Comintern's head, Georgi Dimitrov, elaborated the new policy, directing, *inter alia*, that movements of national liberation be created that should include not only workers but the *petite bourgeoisie*, intellectuals, and peasants; calls for world revolution were to cease—for the time being.<sup>26</sup> The Comintern issued a directive embodying this line to the world's communist parties on 7 July.<sup>27</sup>

On 22 June 1941, Stalin was, of course, not thinking of preserving an alliance that did not yet exist. But soon after the anti-Hitler coalition had taken shape, the political potential of the liberation struggles in Europe must quickly have suggested itself. Virtually everywhere in occupied Europe the Communists were in the forefront of resistance to German occupation. Long experience of clandestine activity often made them the most effective resisters—and gave them influence beyond what mere numbers would suggest.<sup>28</sup> In Greece, Yugoslavia, and

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<sup>24</sup> For Soviet conduct in 1939-41, see Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988)

<sup>25</sup> *Komintern i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina*, 2: 4.

<sup>26</sup> Document 2, "Vyistupleniye Tov. Dimitrova G. M. na zacedanii sekretariata KKKI (22 Iyunia 1941 goda," *ibid.*, 93-95.

<sup>27</sup> Document 15, "Direktiva Kompartiyam otnocheitel'no aktivnoy poddershki otechestvennoi voiniy CCCR protiv Germanii (7 Iyulya 1941)," *ibid.*, 114-15.

<sup>28</sup> Romania is a case in point. Nowhere else in Europe, in all probability, was the Communist Party smaller in relation to the population. And yet General Constantin Sănătescu, who planned the coup of 23 August 1944 that

Bulgaria, the communists constituted the only effective resistance. In France and Italy, they played an indispensable role in the liberation struggle. To the extent that they were successful in organizing resistance to the Germans through the creation of national fronts, the Communists, proclaiming all the while their patriotism and dedication to democratic principles, were also laying the foundation for their future political influence—and that of the Soviet Union.<sup>29</sup> And they were doing so in ways to which the Americans and the British could not object, and for which they might even be grateful.

The Soviets themselves were reassuring about their purposes. From the Atlantic Charter onward the Soviet Union signed every agreement promising democratic self-determination to the occupied nations of Europe; it even tendered unilateral assurances of its own. Soviet diplomats routinely explained to Western colleagues that Moscow “did not want to sovietize the Eastern European states,” though it “would insist on Governments whose policy was friendly to the Soviet Union, which did not preclude equally friendly relations with Britain and [the United States].”<sup>30</sup> Stalin himself made light of world revolution at Teheran, saying “We won’t worry about that. We have found it is not so easy to set up a Communist society.”<sup>31</sup>

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overthrew Marshal Ion Antonescu, found that he had to rely critically on the small but disciplined and highly motivated underground militia of the CP: Constantin Sănătescu, *Jurnal* (București: Humanitas, 1993), 155.

<sup>29</sup> The Americans had an early inkling of this. On May 7, 1942, the American ambassador in Moscow, William H. Standley, reported the following: ‘A well-informed Soviet source has furnished the following fragmentary information to the embassy . . . The present policy of the Comintern is to support wherever possible the formation of popular front governments abroad and thus make it appear that the Comintern is supporting the policies of Great Britain and the United States. As the same time, however, it is the firm intention of the Comintern to place as many secret agents as possible in and to increase its influence over any popular front government that might later emerge in order that these agents may in the future be in a better position to take over control of such governments. Cable, William H. Standley to the State Department, 7 May 1942, NARA, RG 59, State Department Decimal File, 861.00/11939.

<sup>30</sup>Memorandum of conversation, W. A. Harriman with A. E. Bogomolev, Algiers, 14-15 October 1943, Library of Congress, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Box 170. One particularly interestingly example of this type of reassurance occurred in 1944. An article written by Maxim Litvinov under a pseudonym that called for a moderate spheres-of-influence settlement with domestic political self-determination for all states appeared in the publication *Voina i Rabochii Klass*. The Soviet government gave both the British and the American embassies to understand that the piece was a reflection of Soviet policy. Pechatnov, “The Big Three After World War II,” 13-14; Cable, Sir Archibald Clark Kerr to the Foreign Office, 26 July 1944, PRO, FO 371/43306.

<sup>31</sup>W. Averell Harriman and Elie Abel, *Special Envoy to Churchill and Stalin* (New York: Random House, 1975), 283.



The wariness of indispensable allies was not Stalin's only reason for veiling his purposes. Early in 1945, the U.S. Department of State, drawing upon extensive intelligence reporting from the Continent, observed that to judge "from present indications the general mood of the people of Europe is to the left and strongly in favor of far-reaching economic and social reforms, but not, however, in favor of a left-wing totalitarian regime to achieve these reforms."<sup>32</sup> Stalin may have received similar reports, and in any case no intelligence service was required to see that occupied peoples did not want to exchange one yoke for another. He had also concluded that the appeal of the Soviet model was not great. During the war and after, Stalin repeatedly cited the need for caution and deception. To the Communists of East Germany he imparted in 1948 what had long before become a general principle for him: "You should advance towards socialism not by taking a straight road but move in zigzags."<sup>33</sup>

## THE NATIONAL-FRONT STRATEGY

The Comintern's directive of 7 July 1941, contained basic elements of the national front strategy. But as thoughts in the Kremlin turned to postwar diplomacy, and to the disposition of lands taken by the Red Army and even to regions beyond, other elements were added to give the communist movement an attractive and comprehensive program to draw the masses to it while not alarming the Anglo-Americans. In its fully evolved form, the national-front strategy

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<sup>32</sup> Yalta Briefing Book Paper, "Subject: The necessity of the three principal Allies arriving at a common political program for liberated countries," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, The Conferences at Malta and Yalta*, (Washington: Department of State, 1955) 102-103. For the socio-political environment of wartime Eastern Europe, see T. V. Volokitinia, G. P. Murashko, and A. F. Noskova, *Narodnaya Demokratiya: Mif ili Real'noct': Obshchevtvenno-politicheskiye Protsessiy v Voctochnoi Evrope, 1944-1948* (Moscow: Nauka, 1994), 306-14 and passim.

<sup>33</sup> Quoted in Vladimir K. Volkov, "German Question as Stalin Saw It (1947-1952) (Paper prepared for the Stalin Conference of the Cold War International History Project, Yale University, 23-26 September 1999) 11, 14. Stalin gave similar advice to the Hungarian Communists in December 1944. János M. Rainer, "Stalin and Hungary: A General Overview of Contact, 1944-1943." (Paper prepared for the Stalin Conference of the Cold War International History Project, Yale University, 23-26 September 1999), 2. See also Stalin's advice to the Bulgarian CP, below in the text. A common mistake of historians to is to suppose that the national fronts that Stalin put in place late in the war and just after it were ends in themselves and not means to a preordained end. To a considerable degree, Cold-War revisionism has been based upon that error. See, for example, Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Security*, 21 and Leffler, "The Cold War: What Do 'We Now Know.'"

consisted of the following:

1. *The creation of national fronts*: The *OMI*'s program called for the creation of broad national fronts, nominally representative but actually subject to Communist control. The chief targets were workers, the *petite bourgeoisie*, intellectuals, and peasants—a list that appears and reappears like a ritualistic incantation in the instructions of the *OMI* and in the records of Stalin's talks with representatives of the European communist parties.<sup>34</sup>

2. *An emphasis on nationalism*: Since the national fronts consisted of socially disparate groups, and the most pressing task was the struggle against the Germans, the *OMI* instructed the Communists to direct their appeal to nationalism rather than to class antagonisms. This also sent a usefully reassuring message to the Allies about the purposes of the local Communists and their Soviet backers. After the decision to dissolve the Comintern, Dimitrov signaled the Belgian Communist Party that “this organizing central form of International Union no longer accords with the needs of the further development of the Communist Parties of individual countries . . . and is even an obstacle.”<sup>35</sup> From this point on the Communist movement emphasized “national roads to Socialism.”<sup>36</sup>

3. *Calls for moderate, non-revolutionary socioeconomic reform*. The political programs of the national fronts featured calls for land-reform to draw the support

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<sup>34</sup> In his authoritative introduction on 27 February 1946 of the doctrine of “Popular Democracy” -- the public face of the national-front strategy in Eastern Europe after the war -- Dimitrov declared while the Communists were the “leading party” they had to “learn to administer and to build together” with their “allies in the Fatherland Front. He stressed that socialism was to be “the historic work of the entire people.” but stressed particularly “cooperation between the working class and the peasants, craftsmen, intelligentsia and the progressive stratum of the people.” Georgi Dimitrov, “The Communists and the Fatherland Front,” *Political Affairs*, 25 (August 1946), 696-703. For explicit statements that the purpose of the national fronts was to establish Communist control, see the instructions to the Polish CP of 18 July 1944 and the discussion in the politburo of the Romanian CP, both below in the text.

<sup>35</sup> ISCOT 871 Moscow to Belgium, 21 May 1943, PRO, HW 17/40. In his diary Dimitrov wrote that “that the communist parties are falsely accused of being the agents of a foreign country, which hinders their work among the broad masses. The dissolution of the [Communist International] knocks this trump card out of the hands of the enemies. The step undertaken will undoubtedly strengthen the communist parties as national workers' parties . . .” Georgi Dimitrov, *Dnevnik (9 Mart 1933 -- 6 Fevruari 1949)* (Sophia, Bulgaria: Universitetsko Izdatelstvo, 1997), 375 (entry of 21 May 1943)

<sup>36</sup> In this speech of 27 February 1946 Dimitrov said ““every nation will effect its transition to Socialism not by a mapped out route, not exactly as in the Soviet Union, but by its own road, dependent on its historical national, social and cultural circumstances.” Dimitrov, “The Communists and the Fatherland Front.”

of peasants.<sup>37</sup> They also advocated mixed economies in which larger businesses would be nationalized, but in which there would remain significant private sectors.<sup>38</sup> This was a step toward ultimate socialism, but its purpose for the shorter term was to win popularity for the Communists—nationalization was a popular idea in postwar Europe—and to break the economic power of the high bourgeoisie. The Communists were willing to tolerate small enterprises for a while because they believed they could coopt the *petite bourgeoisie* by playing upon its resentments of the high bourgeoisie.<sup>39</sup>

4. *Respect for “bourgeois democracy.”* Parliaments, opposition parties, and elections were all ostensibly part of the Communist program. Leading Communists, Stalin and Dimitrov among them, specifically denied that there was any need for the dictatorships of the proletariat to bring Socialism to Europe—and indeed there would not have been, had the national fronts won the support of the targeted social groups.<sup>40</sup>

5. *The promise of effective governance:* The communist parties presented themselves as responsible parties of good government with practical answers to the pressing material problems of a devastated continent, citing on behalf of this contention the rapid economic development of the USSR. The object was to attract enough popular support that open repression of opposition parties could be kept to a minimum, thus permitting the Communists to conduct politics generally within the bounds of “bourgeois democracy.”<sup>41</sup>

6. *Allied solidarity:* The *OMI* and Stalin himself repeatedly stressed to the

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<sup>37</sup> Stalin particularly emphasized land reform in his conversations with foreign communists. He told the Polish communists, for example, that stressed that “agricultural reform would tie the masses with the [national-front regime] and secure the durability of our power.” Minutes of the Politburo of the Polish Workers’ Party, 14 December 1944, in *Protokoły posiedzeń Biura Politycznego PPR 1944-1945* ed. A. Kocharński . (From a translated extract in the files of the Cold War International History Project.) See also Document 49, “Minutes of the PPR Central Committee (Extracts), 9 October 1944,” in Anthony Polonsky and Boleslaw Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 19 80), 299-300.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Dimitrov’s instructions to the Polish Communists of 4 April 1943, from which there is an extensive quotation in the text below.

<sup>39</sup> See, for example, the instructions to the Polish CP of July 1944, discussed below.

<sup>40</sup> Dimitrov, for example, said that some impatient comrades might prefer a “policy of ‘take up your arms; hit right and left and set up your dictatorship!’” But the Communists had chosen a different course not only because it was “possible and realistic,” but also because it was “undoubtedly much less painful” for those subject to it. Dimitrov, “The Communists and the Fatherland Front.” See also Stalin’s advise to the Bulgarian Communists, which is mentioned in the text below.

<sup>41</sup> Instructive in this regard are Dimitrov’s instructions to the Italian CP of March 1944 and the discussion in the politburo of the Romanian CP on 7 March 1945, both of which are quoted in the text below.

European Communists that the USSR's desire to preserve its alliance with the United States and Britain was an important reason for the adoption of the national front strategy and that they must do nothing to imperil their own or the Soviet Union's relations with those countries.<sup>42</sup>

## DIRECTIVES FOR THE NATIONAL FRONT STRATEGY IN EASTERN EUROPE

Once the tide of battle had begun to turn on the Eastern Front, implementing the national-front strategy became a practical necessity; it much occupied Dimitrov, the *OMI*—and Stalin personally. The work of the *OMI* was an integral part of Soviet foreign policy; after the demise of the Comintern Dimitrov (now head of the *OMI*) began to report directly to Molotov in the *MID*.<sup>43</sup> In the instructions of the *OMI* to the national parties, in the talks of the parties representatives with Stalin, and—not least—in the actions of the parties, there is evident a consistency of conception and execution from mid-1943 onward.

### *Poland*

On 1 March 1943, the Polish Workers Party (PPR), as the Polish Communists called themselves, issued a declaration of intentions. On 4 April, the *OMI* gently reproved the Poles for the radicalism of their statement, observing that parts of it read “almost like a quotation from the constitution of the U.S.S.R.” The reproof, which Dimitrov had helped to write, then explained to the Poles—and to the listening British!—the national-front strategy they were to follow. The PPR's declarations should stress

the consolidation of the liberty and independence of POLAND, the swift restoration of the country, the assurance [to all?] of freedom, bread, work, a roof overhead and peace, and that the only way of realizing this aim will be through the carrying out of a policy, based on a sincere alliance with the U. S. S. R., and through socio-economic reform carried out in the democratic spirit.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See, for example, the instructions to the Polish Party of 18 July 1944 and Stalin's remarks to the Bulgarian CP in 1946, both quoted in the text below.

<sup>43</sup> For the dissolution of the Comintern and the construction of new mechanism for liaison between Moscow and the national parties, see *Komintern i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voina*, 2: 59-65, 72-74.

<sup>44</sup> The question marks by the bracketed words indicate the points at which the British cryptographers who worked on Dimitrov's intercepted messages were uncertain of their decipherment. .

After the expulsion of the Germans, Moscow further directed, “Government must take its stand on a national anti-Fascist front. The political structures in Poland must be defined according to the decisions of the party platform, that is to say, as a democratic and not a Soviet order.” Land reform was to be an important part of the PPR’s program, but it was permissible to speak only of the expropriation of the holdings of large landowners. “Inviolability must be guaranteed to peasant farms regardless of their size.” There were no kulaks in Poland, Moscow added pointedly. It would also be “correct to speak of the nationalization of the banks, of big industries, the mining industry, transport and communications. . .” The justifications for the nationalizations would be economic recuperation, the provision of normal levels of supply, and the curbing of speculation. But “it is clearly to be pointed out that both small-sized and fair-sized industrial and commercial enterprises will be returned to their former owners and that they will be granted appropriate government help.”<sup>45</sup> All in all, it was most important, according to an instruction of February 1944, not to “create the false impression that the PPR is carrying out a course of Sovietization in POLAND, which in the present state of external affairs, can only give encouragement to every sort of provocateur and enemy of the Polish people.”<sup>46</sup>

In July 1944, the Central Committee of the PPR received a letter of guidance from its bureau in Moscow, which had been prepared in consultation with the *OMI*. This document, which noted that “these ideas are the basis of the national fronts in France, Czechoslovakia, Italy, Yugoslavia, etc.,” is a singularly lucid exposition of the ultimate purposes of the national front

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<sup>45</sup> ISCOT 241, Moscow to Poland, 4 April 1943, PRO, HW 17; Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 364 (entry of 1 April 1943). The accuracy of the British decryption is evidence from a comparison of the intercept with the original message: Document 127, “Ukazaniya G. Dimitrova P. Finderu otnocitel’no linii partii (2 aprelya 1943 g.),” *Komintern i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voyna*, 2: 343-44. (The difference in date reflects the fact that the message was composed on April 2 but sent on April 4). It is interesting to compare this document with the instructions sent to the French CP almost exactly a year earlier. While the latter document does contain a call for the creation of a national front, the emphasis is entirely on matters military. There is no discussion of a political program as such. The contrast suggests that, as one would expect, the national-front strategy took shape as the tide of battle changed on the eastern front. Document 68, “Pis’mo G. Dimitrova I. Stalinu i V. Molotovu c izlozheniyem rekomendazii M. Teresa i A. Marti (28 I. C. Aprelya 1942 goda),” *Komintern i Vtoraya Mirovaya Voyna*, 2: 215-17.

<sup>46</sup> ISCOT 812, Moscow to Poland, 25 February 1944, PRO HW/61.

strategy: the seizure of political power for the Communists in a fashion that would not rend the Grand Alliance. The directive stressed the importance of forming “a government supported by a majority of the people” that would pursue policies not threatening to Allied unity. This would be possible “if there is a sustained and consistent national front policy, if the working class led by our party plays the leading role in the national liberation war, if the reactionary forces can be made to fall apart.” In “class terms,” the document continued, “this means a campaign to abolish monopoly capitalism and landed estates. This will be conducted by workers, peasants, the intelligentsia and the *petite-bourgeoisie*. They will drag part of the bourgeoisie with them and neutralize its majority.” There followed a criticism of certain excessively radical measures taken by the party in Poland. They were dangerous because, if continued, the “effect on national politics would be the abandonment on our part of efforts to win over the majority of the people. It would give rise to a powerful reactionary underground with a wide social base. Our aim, on the contrary, is to create a situation in which our own forces would be sufficient to overwhelm the reactionaries.” Worse, such radicalism would “make Poland a bone of contention between the Teheran powers.” The “correct policy for a national front requires a series of concessions and compromises which will split our opponents without fundamentally altering our aim: satisfying the major demands of the masses and creating a situation favorable to our long-term plans.”<sup>47</sup>

### *Hungary*

In a series of meetings in September and October 1944, Hungarian Communists in Moscow developed a characteristically “popular democratic” program for their country, which was then in the throes of being liberated by the Red Army. The proceedings provide evidence suggesting that the life span of a national-front democracy was to be inversely proportional to a country’s importance to the Soviet Union. Stalin told the Hungarians that they might have to

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<sup>47</sup> Document 17, “Letter to the Central Committee of the PPR from the CMKP in Moscow,” 18 July 1944, Polonsky and Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland*, 230-32. Not surprisingly, the editors note that the soon-after issued party manifesto was “striking in its avoidance of radical and above all socialist phraseology.” Ibid., 249-250, note 2. For an example of the party’s representation of itself in accordance with the instructions described above, see ibid., Document 26, “Minutes of the Meeting of PPR Delegates from Puławy . . .”, 5 August 1944, 258-64.

share the political stage with other parties for as long as ten or fifteen years in order to distract Western attention from the relatively rapid sovietization of Poland.<sup>48</sup> Hungary is also interesting as an example of Communist confidence in their ability to win popular support with their program. They confidently expected to win Budapest's municipal elections of October 1945, and were stunned by their poor showing.<sup>49</sup>

### *Romania*

The inauguration of the national front strategy in Romania is particularly noteworthy, both because of new evidence of Stalin's direct hand in it and because of the extraordinary record of a meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP) at which the leadership discussed at length and in detail the political strategy of the national front in Romania at the very moment of its inception.

In June 1944, as Soviet forces slowly advanced into the country, the very small Romanian Communist Party formed the National Democratic Bloc (NDB) with the leading opposition parties, the National Liberals and the National Peasant Party. The NDB was not, however, a true instance of the national front strategy because the Communists were not the dominant element, although they did play a significant role in the coup of 23 August 1944 that overthrew the pro-German *Conducător* Marshal Ion Antonescu. The Communist's role in the government subsequently formed by Generals Constantin Sănătescu and Nicolae Rădescu was not large. But this anomalous situation did not endure for long. On or shortly before 4 January 1945, Stalin met with two leading Romanian Communists, Ana Pauker and Gheorghie Gheorghiu-Dej in Moscow. Pauker was a veteran communist who had spent the war in Moscow where she had worked closely with Dimitrov. Reportedly a favorite of Stalin's, she was effectively the leader of the RCP. Gheorghiu-Dej, who served as Minister of Transportation in Radescu's government, was soon the RCP's secretary general. Stalin told his visitors that the time for a

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Gati, *Hungary and the Soviet Bloc* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1986), 33-37.

<sup>49</sup> Bela Zhelitski, "Postwar Hungary, 1944-1946,": in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949*. (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 78.

Romanian national front had arrived. Dimitrov recorded what he heard from Pauker and Gheorghiu-Dej in his diary:

“I received at the villa the Romanian comrades Ana Pauker, Gheorghiu-Dej (Romanian] minister) and Apostle (chairman] of the Romanian] unions.

“They informed [me] in detail about the situation in Romania and the activity of the communist] party.

“They related the conversation with Stalin]. The latter gave advice in this sense:

“1. Attention should be paid chiefly to agrarian reform (distribution of the land of large lander owners who have fled and of German agents is actually now already taking place). The land of the palace and monasteries should not now be touched.

after “(America is developed because she never had a landed class; France developed the removal of the landed class.)

“2. Machine tractor stations should be established. (The USSR will give a certain number of tractors.)

“3. The USSR can give a certain quantity of cotton for processing in the textile factories of Romania.

“4. The question of nationalization should not be raised now. The development of the oil industry should receive attention.

“5. They should take pains not to scare and drive away the bourgeois] elements (the anti-German ones)—in particular Tatarescu’s<sup>50</sup> group.

“6. The [Tudor] Vladimirescu Division should be used as the internal support of the Nat[ional] Dem[ocratic] Front.<sup>51</sup>

“7. Course toward the creation of a government of the Nat[ional] Dem[ocratic] Front.

“8. They should develop the thesis that if such a government were [formed], it would help North[ern] Transylvania to be Romanian.

“9. If such a government were formed, the USSR is ready to conclude a pact of mutual assistance, similar to the pact with Czechoslovakia.”<sup>52</sup>

Soon after Andrei Ya. Vishinskii oversaw the forcible installation of a government dominated by the left-wing coalition, the National Democratic Front (NDF), which took office on 6 March 1945. On paper, the Communists controlled only three ministries, though they were

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<sup>50</sup>Gheorghe Tătărescu, former prime minister and head of a splinter faction of the National Liberal Party.

<sup>51</sup> The Tudor Vladimirescu Division had been formed in the Soviet Union from among Romanian prisoners of war.

<sup>52</sup> Dimitrov, *Dnevnik (9 Mart 1933 -- 6 Fevruari 1949)*, 458 (entry of 4 January 1945). The brackets indicate abbreviations and omissions in the original text.



critical ones: internal affairs, justice, and transportation. Secretly, however, six other members of the cabinet were Communists.<sup>53</sup> Another characteristic of the national-front government in Romania, as elsewhere, was the use of splinter factions to divide the established parties.<sup>54</sup>

The leaders of the RCP met on the evening of 7 March to plan their next moves. The transcript of this meeting provides a vivid picture of a “national front” at the moment of creation. The meeting was strictly secret and the Communist leaders spoke with apparent candor. Pauker and Gheorghiu-Dej—two of the four leading participants in the meeting—had, moreover, been instructed not long before by Stalin himself on the finer points of the national-front strategy.<sup>55</sup>

Fourteen members of the Central Committee attended the meeting, but only four spoke at any length, doing so in order of their precedence within the party: Ana Pauker, Vasile Luca, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and Teohari Georgescu.<sup>56</sup> The discursive, even rambling character of their remarks shows that they spoke extemporaneously. But plainly discernible among the

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<sup>53</sup> As Ana Pauker’s observed during the meeting of the Romanian CP’s central committee on 7 March 1945 (“*Sedința din 7 Martie 1945 cu activul central al P. C. R.*”) At the time I used these records they were in the custody of the Romanian Army. This document bore the citation *Dosar Nr. 16, Filele 23-35*. After my trip to Bucharest the records of the Central Committee of the RCP were turned over to the *Arhivele Statului din România* (Romanian State Archives) where they were at last report unavailable.

<sup>54</sup> See the instructions to the Polish CP quoted above on the importance of splitting the opposition. In the case of Romania, the discredited former premier Gheorghe Tărărescu was in accordance with Stalin’s instructions brought into the government as minister of foreign affairs. He carried with him dissident members of the National Liberal Party -- one of Romania’s two “historic” parties, which, from this time on, remained split.

<sup>55</sup> Before her return to Romania Pauker had also been a close collaborator of Dimitrov in both the Comintern and the *OMI*, as her frequent appearances in the latter’s diary testify.

<sup>56</sup> Though without office, Pauker, a veteran communist who had once been a school teacher, was acting head of the party pending the appointment of a secretary general. A favorite of Stalin and Dimitrov, her sex and her Jewish nationality barred her from becoming titular head of the party. Vasile Luca was Pauker’s deputy, and like her held no governmental office. Reportedly a favorite of Moscow, his political future, like Pauker’s, was limited by his nationality -- Hungarian. Gheorghiu-Dej, minister of transportation, was ethnically a Romanian, a genuine proletarian, and an effective leader who became a hero to communists because of his role in the railroad strikes of 1933, which led to his being sent to prison, where he remained until 1944. These characteristics, in Stalin’s view, outweighed his liabilities -- he was a homosexual of limited education who bore a disconcerting resemblance to a Neanderthal man. He became secretary-general at the party congress of October, 1945. Teohari Georgescu, another veteran Communist, was minister of interior in the new government and therefore primarily responsible for the extensive repression of political opponents that followed its establishment.

digressions and repetitions was a fixed point of reference: the national-front strategy. The concern now was to refine the party's program and to implement it more effectively. Pauker and Luca explained how this was to be done.

Pauker began her remarks by paying tribute to the concept of the front. While duly acknowledging that assistance from the "outside" had helped to bring about the "important success" of Rădescu's overthrow, she claimed much credit for the party, noting specifically its organization of a broad popular front:

Without the powerful agitation of the NDF, without the powerful organizations of the country's workers, without the mobilization of the peasants and the support of the peasants, without the activation of the intellectuals and the expansion of the circle of democratic intellectuals to include even priests and every kind of intellectual, without the work done in the army we could not—with all the aid being prepared from the outside to give to us and which was given to us—have achieved what we did on 6 March.<sup>57</sup>

From self-congratulation Pauker passed quickly to constructive criticism of the party's performance to date. The success the day before showed that the party had a "correct program," but there were still certain "weaknesses." Readers used to thinking of the Communist parties of Eastern Europe and the Balkans as hated minorities imposed upon "anti-Soviet" populations will doubtless note with surprise that Pauker's understanding of the situation was quite different: She believed, as the Hungarian comrades did, that the Party had considerable popular support and could readily gain still more. Her first criticism, which following speakers took up, was that the Party, though dominant within the NDF, had submerged its identity within the larger group. Calling the "inevidence of the Party" its "chief weakness," Pauker expressed confidence that if the Party had revealed its leading role within the NDF, it would have enjoyed "real growth" both in influence and membership.

Pauker went on to develop another aspect of the problem of the party's "inevidence" that some readers may also find disconcerting: The party had *overly dominated* the various

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<sup>57</sup> Transcript of meeting, Central Committee of the RCP, 7 March 1945. (See note 53)

organizations of the NDF such as the *Frintul Plugarilor* (Ploughman's Front):

The party should help those organizations to do their own business, so that they can work by themselves, and there will therefore be an NDF in which each [organization] has its own public image. In many places, and in some measure in Bucharest, the party takes over the work of these organizations and in that way contributes to a kind of fusing of the work of the party with that of the NDF and to confusion.

The “fusing” of the Party's work with the work of the NDF had had the undesirable consequence of obscuring the public image of the party; it also drained life and effectiveness from the satellite organizations. This was a serious matter:

The government of democratic concentration means that there must be a government which can achieve its goals only with the entire people. The tasks of mobilization we face are therefore the responsibilities of the ministers and of our party. What are the means for realizing a broad mobilization of the masses? Do we have the means or not? Doubtless we do. We have the organizations of the syndicates, we have the Ploughman's Front, we have an organization for intellectuals. With these organizations we should be able to accomplish our tasks.<sup>58</sup>

But these organizations were not quite enough: there has to be a still broader mobilization of the masses:

But we shall not achieve our goals only with these organizations; to achieve our purposes we must involve the entire country. For this reason the NDF, which is the organ with which we can bring the country together into one truly complete organization—for that reason the NDF must now rapidly organize in the broadest way throughout the country and in every sphere, encompassing not only workers and peasants but housewives, tradesmen, shopkeepers, merchants, so that there shall remain no stratum which is not aligned with the line of our activity. Only by putting everyone to work, by encouraging the initiative of the people, shall we be able to start out on the path we want to be on—arresting of war criminals, destroying fascism, and in the economic realm, improving the lives of workers, and fighting against speculation. We shall be able to do this job in all areas only if the NDF becomes a very broad organization.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

It would not be enough, however, merely to have more organizations for more segments of the population. Returning to her earlier point, Pauker stressed that the organizations needed the greater vitality that would have to come from a degree of spontaneity and self-actualization. Pauker envisioned strengthening the syndicates and factory committees as well as creating popular councils throughout the country. She was not, of course, advocating a kind of participatory democracy. Without any apparent sense of irony, she said the party wanted “independence” for the satellite organizations, but “not in the sense that each will do what occurs to it, but that each shall be disposed to do work according to the determined line given and received.” In short, while the NDF was to have the appearance of a variegated coalition of self-actualizing units, it was to be a means for transmitting the “determined line” of the Communists throughout the population.

But how to reconcile the “tasks” of the party with the encouragement of a degree of spontaneity among the organizations of the NDF? And how could a government imposed by a Soviet ultimatum even think about giving voice to the people through the creation of popular councils? The obvious answer—that party cadre would see that the councils did not go off the rails—is accurate but insufficient. Pauker dealt at length with this conundrum: the reactionary segments of the population would be repressed, while the Communists, by successfully addressing the many pressing problems facing Romania, would win the allegiance of the remainder:

Under present conditions we are moving steadily toward seizing much wider popularity; in these conditions it can be fatal if we disappear and merge into a mass, if the party does not keep its backbone, its image as a disciplined party, a revolutionary party that follows a correct line, a steadfast party of the working class in the most positive sense—because it has the strongest backbone. Therefore, accordingly, I believe that we must take stock of things and arrive at concrete decisions, that we operate as an indispensable government of positive accomplishments which achieves its ends through broad mobilization of the masses.

In short, the NDF would be used to gain enough power to repress the party’s enemies and to

enable the national front to realize its program of problem-solving good government. That, in turn, would gain enough support for the NDF so that repression could be kept within limits and the appearance of “bourgeois democracy” could be preserved.

Pauker discussed repression first: “cleansing the land” was necessary so that “[our] work shall meet with fewer difficulties—which is to say, purging, not letting people on the street who will become active enemies, but possibly sending them into camps, where they will be sorted and put to work—arresting of war criminals. And this must be done not only on the top, but from top to bottom.”

Pauker turned next to economic matters. After a few digressions, she came to that portion of the economic program that had the deepest political significance for garnering majority political support for the party: land reform. The situation of the Romanian peasantry was desperate, and those who improved it stood a good chance of controlling the country’s future.<sup>60</sup>

Pauker reeled off other economic and political tasks for the Party: increasing production and curbing hoarding, sabotage, and speculation, and reeducating the population away from “the fascist poison, the chauvinism, which still exists in the population, the hatred of the Soviet Union—and the work we shall have to do, not only arrests and sending [people] to the camps, but also fighting rumor-mongers, through propaganda.” Also important, Pauker said, was maintaining the party’s control over its ministers and curbing the pretensions of the uppity Social Democrats. She concluded with a call for preparation of a comprehensive program for presentation at the party congress scheduled for the following October.

Vasile Luca took the floor next. Like Pauker, he stressed both the great responsibilities that confronted the party and the importance of observing party discipline, replacing

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<sup>60</sup> It would be difficult to overstate the centrality of this issue in Romanian politics. There had been two major efforts at land reform before -- in 1864 and 1921. The results of the land reform of 1921 were far-reaching, but because of rural overpopulation it failed to create a prosperous class of middle peasants -- those with holdings of 3 to 5 hectares, the amount of land required to meet the needs of an average peasant family. In 1941 properties of that size represented only 18.4 percent of all farms, while fully 58 percent were smaller than 3 hectares, the average size of properties below 5 hectares being 2 hectares. A survey of 1938 found that only 14 percent of farms between 1 and 3 hectares had an income greater than consumption. Henry L. Roberts, *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1951) 52-55, 61.

incompetent officials, recruiting technicians, and devising solutions to the country's problems, especially the agrarian issue. For Luca, this program of clean and efficient government was a matter of practical politics: "If we work well, we shall have the support of the people." Developing another point first raised by Pauker, Luca stressed that if the party was to gain credit for its accomplishments, it had to reveal its responsibility for the changes in the country: Now the NDF, having attained control of the government, produces results, that will be a success for the party. And we must take advantage this success and provide that the role of the Party shall be unveiled and the people will see: Look!, they will say. Here is the Communist Party, which does not cut down or hang its opponents but comes with results.<sup>61</sup>

There would, of course, be limits to the party's openness: "That does not mean that we shall begin to talk about our final purpose." For the time being, "we should reveal the role of the party in resolving problems in the context of bourgeois democracy." That form of government would end once it had become safe to implement the "final purpose," and even before then there would be limits to "bourgeois democracy": "We must not forget that we also have powerful enemies, whom we must now fell with the state apparatus."

In sum, the program of the RCP in March 1945 was, in the plain testimony of its leaders, to pursue its undisclosed "final purpose" through an intermediate state of "bourgeois democracy," which would not, however, exclude the rigorous suppression of "fascist" and "reactionary" elements. During this stage, the Party would govern through a broadly encompassing umbrella organization that would include a multitude of subsidiary satellite organizations for "not only workers and peasants but housewives, tradesmen, shopkeepers, [and] merchants." These organizations would serve as "transmission belts" (to use Trotskii's famous

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<sup>61</sup> The confidence of Communists in Romania and elsewhere in their ability to produce sufficiently impressive economic results to draw the masses to them is a notable and, I think, neglected aspect of the postwar climate. This confidence was deeply grounded in the Soviet achievements between the wars but especially in the USSR's very impressive showing during the war. To many observers -- and not only to communists -- it seemed that the Soviet system had proved its superiority over both capitalism and fascism. For an instance, see Document 51, Part II, "The President Situation and the Party's Tasks -- Speech delivered by Władysław Gomułka," in Polonsky and Drukier, *The Beginnings of Communist Rule in Poland*, 307.

phrase) to bring the entire population (save that portion marked for repression) under the influence of the party, which would solidify its position by repressing enemies even as it gained popularity through social and economic reforms in a country that sorely needed them.<sup>62</sup>

### *Bulgaria*

From Moscow, Dimitrov devoted particular attention to the execution of the national front strategy in his native Bulgaria. Although forced underground, the Bulgarian Communists were able to draw important allies into the Fatherland Front and to create a partisan movement. In March 1944, the Party reported to Dimitrov, “Our political line has convinced our allies among the political parties and public leaders that we are fighting for the popular democratic party of the Fatherland Front.”<sup>63</sup> The arrival of the Red Army in September 1944 brought the Fatherland Front to power, and in short order the Communists had effective control of the country. By October 29, 1944, the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) could report to Dimitrov that “authority is in fact for the most part in our hands, and our people predominate on the committees and administrations.”<sup>64</sup>

Dimitrov provided his followers with a detailed tutorial in the national-front strategy. The BCP should seek no obvious monopoly of power. Rather, “the democratic progressive forces of the people and all truly anti-German elements and groups of active workers” should be organized “around the National Committee of the Fatherland Front, as being the representative of the Bulgarian people, and the organizer and director of the common struggle of the people against the German robbers and their Bulgarian Fascist agents.”<sup>65</sup> At the same time, however,

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<sup>62</sup> The unfolding of “Popular Democracy” in Romania, though outside the scope of this essay, closely followed the program outlined above. Useful is Gheorghiu-Dej’s speech on the subject at the first meeting of the Cominform in September 1947: Giuliano Procacci et al., ed, *The Cominform: Minutes of the Three Conferences 1947/1948.1949* (Milano: Feltrinelli Editore, 1994), 149-63.

<sup>63</sup> Yelena Valeva, “The CPSU, the Comintern, and the Bulgarians,” in Norman Naimark and Leonid Gibianskii, eds., *The Establishment of Communist Regimes in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1997), 48-49.

<sup>64</sup> ISCOT 684, Bulgaria to Moscow, 29 October 1944, PRO, HW 17/41.

<sup>65</sup> ISCOT 649, Moscow to Bulgaria, 5 September 1944, PRO, HW 17/41

the leaders of major political organizations were to be replaced if they proved insufficiently malleable.<sup>66</sup> Never portray the struggle in class terms, Dimitrov advised, and eschew all that smacks of revolution: “Do not forget that the internal and external enemies of our people will assiduously use everything that intrinsically, or even in appearance only, might indicate the prosecution of a course of sovietization in Bulgaria.”<sup>67</sup> Having learned that Communist activists were forming soviets around Varna, Dimitrov signaled that the Communists should “put a stop to this immediately, and prevent the forming of Soviets and the disarming of the police. Such activity can only add fuel to the flames of our enemies . . . . Please take a firm standing on democratic principles.”<sup>68</sup> “Please,” Dimitrov advised, “also be cautious generally of copying formally the system and institutions of the Red Army.”<sup>69</sup> In particular, the introduction of political commissars was to be avoided.<sup>70</sup> Dimitrov lamented the excesses of some members of the Communist militia who, by “carrying out arrests, searches, confiscations and distribution of goods . . . are creating many difficulties for us with our Allies.”<sup>71</sup> Nothing was more important than to appear before the people as the champions of good government: “We must come forward and act, not as common irresponsible provincial agitators, but as sober, positive Bolsheviks and political workers and statesmen.”<sup>72</sup>

After his return to Bulgaria late in 1945, Dimitrov proved a less than apt pupil in his own school. Both he and his followers found it difficult to curb their brutal impulses, and it was by

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<sup>66</sup> Thus Dimitrov advocated removing the other famous Georgi Dimitrov, head of the Agrarian Union, and replacing with the supposedly more tractable Nikola Petkov. ISCOT No. 624, Moscow to Bulgaria, 6 October 1944, PRO, WH 17/41.

<sup>67</sup> ISCOT 486, Moscow to Bulgaria, 15 September 1944, *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> ISCOT 652, Moscow to Bulgaria, 9 September 1944, *ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> ISCOT 493, Moscow to Bulgaria, 14 September 1944, *ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> ISCOT 485, Moscow to Bulgaria, 17 September 1944, *ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> ISCOT 622, Moscow to Bulgaria, 28 October 1944, *ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> ISCOT 602, Moscow to Bulgaria, 24 September 1944, *ibid.*



brutality that they brought socialism to Bulgaria, ultimately with Stalin's permission.<sup>73</sup> But this was not before Stalin tried to keep the national front strategy alive a while longer. Through most of 1946 he urged forbearance, even after the Bulgarian Communists, infuriated by the independence of the Agrarian Union, wanted to crack down. He even advised the BCP to permit parties to exist outside the Fatherland Front, and shared with its leaders the reason for his advice: the need for both Bulgaria and the USSR to maintain good relations with the United States and Britain.<sup>74</sup> Stalin told the Bulgarian Communists in September 1946 that they should unite "the working class with the other toiling masses on the basis of a minimalist programme," as "the time for a maximalist programme had not yet come." A party formed on this basis "would be Communist, but you would have a broader mask for the present period." Significantly, Stalin added, "This would help you to achieve Socialism in a different way —without the dictatorship of the proletariat."<sup>75</sup>

#### DIRECTIVES FOR THE NATIONAL-FRONT STRATEGY IN WESTERN EUROPE

In Western Europe, the national-front strategy was generally similar to that pursued in Eastern Europe, but the short-term aims were necessarily different, as the region lay within the Anglo-American rather than the Soviet sphere of military operations. This precluded the coerced establishment of nominal coalition regimes in which Communist influence predominated. In essence, Moscow dictated that the communist parties should lay the basis for future political strength by combating "reactionary" influences, making alliances with other parties of the Left,

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<sup>73</sup> Vasselin Dimitrov, "Revolution Released: Stalin, The Bulgarian Communist Party, and the Founding of the Cominform," in Gori and Pons, *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War*, 283, 285-86.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 280.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 284 In this case, speaking as he was to other Communists, Stalin may well have been sincere. He also deployed a similar argument, however, to lull the Polish Socialists into remaining in a coalition with the Communists until the elections of January 1947 were safely out of the way Krzysztof Persak, "Stalin and the Polish Leaders: The Soviet Dictator's Mediation between the Polish Communist and Socialist Parties, 1946" (Paper for the conference "Stalin and the Cold War, 1945-1953," Cold War International History Project, September, 1999, Yale University), 14-15, 19-22.

and identifying themselves with the aspirations of the masses.

### *Italy*

In March 1944, the Italian Communist Party (ICP) adopted a draft program under the personal supervision of Dimitrov. In transmitting the draft program to Molotov, Dimitrov stated that he had discussed it with the ICP's leader, Palmiro Togliatti, and found its "basic positions correct" as an adaptation of the national-front strategy to Western Europe. Much of the lengthy document concerned immediate aspects of the struggle against Germany, but the political program required the ICP "to destroy the remnants of fascism in all spheres of Italian life and to establish democracy," and while so doing to avoid abstract Marxist propaganda on the one hand and mere opportunism on the other. Doing so would give the ICP "the character of a mass popular organization, consistently struggling for the freedom and independence of the Italian people, for the genuine interests and hopes of the working class, the peasant masses, [and] the working intellectuals for the rebirth of Italy as a progressive, democratic country. . . ." The document stressed cooperation with the Allies: the ICP should adhere to the Moscow Conference's "Declaration on Italy" and loyally support a coalition government led by Count Carlo Sforza, whom the Anglo-Americans backed. The Communists were to participate in the coalition and to strive in every way to establish themselves as responsible and effective agents of good government:

The Communist Party should attempt to extend concrete, broad, and effective aid for the satisfaction of the immediate needs of the people (the supplying of food, battling against speculation, against unemployment, etc.). The Communist Party must appear before the masses . . . as a party which above all understands their needs and extends help to them.<sup>76</sup>

The ICP, the document continued, should use the influence it gained during the war to pursue through democratic means the following program to put Italy "on the path of political and social progress":

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<sup>76</sup>Document 174, "Zapiska M. Erkoli (P. Tol'yatti) 'Ob ocherdnykh zadachakh Kommunistov Italii,' napravlennaya G. Dimitroviym V. Molotovu (1 marta 1944 g)," in *Komintern i Btoraya Mirovaya Voina*, 2: 426-41

(1) the drafting of a democratic constitution, the liquidation of every manner of fascist survival, separation of church and state, creation of a democratic army, and “energetic repressive measures against any attempt at reviving in whatever form an antidemocratic or fascist movement; (2) renunciation of imperialism and a policy of peace towards all peoples, “particularly with the peoples of the Soviet Union”; (3) “Broad agrarian reform; destruction of the remnants of feudalism in the countryside and curbing arbitrary monopolistic trusts; a consistent policy of increasing the standard of living of the working and peasant masses; progressive social legislation; defense of the small and middle properties from ruin and absorption by the calamity of speculation that weighs upon the people”; (4) severe punishment of all traitors, fascists and collaborators, and the confiscation of their property.<sup>77</sup>

The resemblance to the program for winning popular support mapped out at the Romanian Communist Party’s meeting on 7 March 1945, could hardly be greater—or less coincidental.

#### *France*

During a meeting of 19 November 1944 Stalin himself emphasized to Maurice Thorez, leader of the French Communist Party (FCP) the need for conciliatory and popularity-building policies that would make possible a coalition of left-wing forces and rally targeted sectors of public opinion behind it. He chided the French communists for having too confrontational an attitude toward potential allies, particularly the Socialists, and for maintaining partisan formations under arms. The French comrades, he said, seemed not to realize that times had changed. Going to the heart of the political calculation behind national-front strategy, Stalin said bluntly that the Communists were not strong enough to bear the battle against reaction all by themselves; without allies, they risked being “strangled.” The FCP had to gather its forces and seek allies through the creation of a front constructed from the parties of the Left, and (surprise!) workers, intellectuals, and peasants. The platform of this broad organization, Stalin explained, should stress economic resurrection, full employment, and the defense of democracy.<sup>78</sup>

#### *Germany*

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Anglichanye i Amerikantziy xotyat vezde sozdat’ reaktzionnyiye pravitel’ctva,’” *Istochnik*, 4, 1995, 152-58.

The formulation of a national-front strategy for Germany required more time than in the other major European countries. There were, of course, special circumstances—the Soviets would occupy only part of the country, and the Big Three did not reach final agreement on the details of the occupation until the Potsdam Conference (16-26 July 1945). An excess of zeal on the part of the German communists also contributed to the delay. Representatives of the German Communist Party (the *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands*, *KPD*) worked through 1944 to produce a program, only to have the *OMI* set it aside for reasons similar to those that had led the Comintern to reject the Polish Communist Party's first attempt at a platform in 1943. The draft German program did not provide sufficiently for the participation of other political parties and called for the rapid and complete nationalization of industry.<sup>79</sup> When the German Communist leader, Wilhelm Pieck met with Stalin, Molotov and the rising star of the Politburo, Andrei Zhdanov in the Kremlin in June 1945 to discuss a new program for the German party, Stalin carefully stressed that “anti-fascist” struggle should take the form of the “completion of the bourgeois democratic revolution” as well as land reform and the creation of a broadly encompassing national front. It was too early, he stressed, to impose the Soviet system in Germany. The notes of Dimitrov and Pieck on this conference are sketchy, but they suffice to show that Stalin urged upon the German Communists essentially the same program he had put to their Polish, Hungarian, Romanian, and French comrades.<sup>80</sup> In January 1946, not long after he had offered similar advice to the Bulgarian Communists, Stalin told the leaders of the KPD that they should seek to establish socialism democratically through reliance on Western parliamentary practices rather than through dictatorship.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Vojtech Mastny, *Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), 146, 233, 254.

<sup>80</sup> Dimitrov; *Dnevnik*, 481 (7 June 1945); Document 1, “Beratung am 3.6.1945 um 6 Uhr bei Stalin, Molotov, and Shdanow,” in Rolf Badstübner and Wilfried Loth, *Wilhelm Pieck -- Aufzeichnungen zur Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1953* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 50.

<sup>81</sup> Loth, “Stalin's Plans for Post-War Germany,” 26-27. See also Stalin's extended comments to British Laborites about the feasibility of democratic, non-revolutionary paths to Socialism. *Ibid.*, 27. In September 1946 the Soviet held free municipal elections in their zone in which the Communists and their allies fared rather badly.

Because of the special circumstances of joint occupation, the Soviet zone in Germany provided the most enduring example of the national-front strategy. Order No. 2 of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany (SVAG) authorized the establishment of political parties. The Soviets permitted an independent Christian Democratic Union (CDU) to emerge, and only in 1949 was it reduced to puppet status.<sup>82</sup> While the CDU was a member of a larger bloc of democratic parties, the enforced union of the Socialist Party with the KPD produced the Socialist Unity Party, which was the “true” national front to which the usual constituencies—the workers, the intellectuals, and the peasants—were supposed to rally. Autumn 1945 saw sweeping land reform in the Soviet zone, but with a significant difference from Soviet practice—Dimitrov instructed the KPD that “kulaks” were to keep their lands.<sup>83</sup> Apart from the estates of the *Junkertum* and the largest enterprises, there was no expropriation of the means of production until 1952.<sup>84</sup> The KPD never denied that socialism was its ultimate goal, but stressed that the blessed state was to be reached gradually over a distinct “German Road.”<sup>85</sup>

In sum, the German edition of the national front strategy differed from the Eastern European iterations in only one fundamental respect: it lasted longer. The slow approach to socialism in Germany was not, as has been argued, a sign of Stalin’s intrinsically limited aims in Germany. Neither is the ideological rationale for moderation developed in Moscow’s instructions to the KPD and to Soviet administrators in Germany—that completion of the bourgeois revolution had to precede socialism—to be credited as a serious explanation of Soviet policy.<sup>86</sup> The reasons for the endurance of the national front in Germany were wholly political. Stalin

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<sup>82</sup> Norman M. Naimark, “The Soviets and the Christian Democrats: the Challenge of a ‘Bourgeois’ Party in Eastern Germany, 1945-9,” in Gori and Pons, *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53* 37-53.

<sup>83</sup> Naimark, “The Soviets and the Christian Democrats,” 40.

<sup>84</sup> Loth, “Stalin’s Plans for Post-War Germany,” 31-2.. In December 1948 Stalin refused a request from the KPD to expropriate other forms of private property. *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>85</sup> Naimark, “The Soviets and the Christian Democrats,” 44.

<sup>86</sup> Wilfred Loth, “Stalin’s Plans for Post-War Germany,” in Gori and Pons, *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1943-53*, 23-4.

hoped that Communist influence would seep from the Soviet zone of occupation into the Western zones to produce, in time, a united socialist Germany. Workers, peasants, and intellectuals, he calculated, would begin to chafe under the misrule of the Western democracies and then look eastward for solutions to problems for which capitalism had no remedy. But for this to happen, it was not enough that the targeted groups should see in the Soviet zone the hope of national reunification and the fruits of socialist good government—there had to be nothing for them to fear. Speaking to the East German Communists in December 1948, Stalin counseled: There is so far no need for any kind of expropriation; the situation is not yet ripe for it. There is no need either for any compulsory decision striking capitalist elements right on the head. You would weaken your positions thereby. It is premature to take the road of people's democracy. You must wait. But a law against profiteering should be issued. Individual profiteers should be punished but the entire group of capitalists should be let alone. The workers and the peasants will like that. They fear losing their jobs if private enterprises are closed as a result of expropriation. . . . The situation in Germany is currently complicated, you should advance toward socialism not by taking a straight road but by moving in zigzags. Herein lies the specific nature of the task . . . . The German people's attention should not now be concentrated on the questions which are posed in the people's democracies but on the question of Germany's unity, on the peace treaty, price cuts, wage raises and better nourishment. That will unite all Germany, and that is the main thing.<sup>87</sup>

At a minimum, Stalin hoped for a neutral Germany, and that required that the KPD should not so alienate the noncommunist parties that they preferred alliance with the West. Both the maximum and the minimum Soviet programs for Germany, then, required the continuance of the national front strategy in the Soviet zone with its nominal respect for “bourgeois democracy” and a mixed economy.

#### SOME REASONS FOR THE FAILURE OF THE NATIONAL FRONT STRATEGY

To describe the national-front strategy is to appreciate the extent of its failure. Nowhere in Eastern Europe did such a front achieve a critical mass of political support sufficient to enable

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<sup>87</sup> Quoted in Vladimir K. Volkov, “German Question As Stalin Saw It (1947-1952). Paper for the conference “Stalin and the Cold War, 1945-1953,” Cold War International History Project, September, 1999, Yale University. Volkov's valuable paper summarizes the records of Stalin's talks with the leading German Communists, most of which were unavailable to earlier researchers like Loth and Naimark.

the Communists to attain and hold power without resorting to overtly dictatorial methods inimical to the Soviet Union's continued alliance with the United States and Britain. The reasons for the failure to achieve popular support varied greatly from country to country, but a few generalizations are possible. The Soviets had supposed that they could fuse the desire for socioeconomic progress with nationalism to create an unstoppable political force. But in the end, nationalism trumped "progress." It did so because of the inherent strength of nationalist passions in Eastern Europe and the Balkans, because the communist parties had been recruited disproportionately from unpopular minorities, because nothing could disguise the fact that the Communists owed their political salience chiefly to Soviet backing, and because the generally undisciplined behavior of the Red Army terrified and alienated populations everywhere. The antagonisms that soon developed between the Communists and other parties with stronger local connections further sharpened the sense that the former were an alien presence. The antagonism arose from the reluctance of noncommunist leaders to play the role the national-front strategy assigned to them—loyal subordinates in a communist-dominated coalition—when they commanded more votes than Moscow's minions. The opposition parties' defiance, moreover, soon found strong support from the United States and Britain. That support emboldened many opposition leaders and persuaded them that they did not really need to come to terms with the Soviets or with the local Communists. The Communists' hope that they could establish themselves as parties of good government, also failed because of their inexperience at practical governance that the central committee of the RCP lamented at its meeting of 7 March 1945, because Soviet economic exactions often hindered their efforts to deal with the dislocations the war had left in its wake, and because the tasks that confronted postwar governments in Eastern Europe and the Balkans were so overwhelming that frequent failure was necessarily the lot of those who addressed them. Soviet administrators hindered as much as they helped the local Communists because they, products of the hard school of Stalinism, rarely possessed the tolerance and flexibility the national-front strategy required.<sup>88</sup> The local communists themselves

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<sup>88</sup> A good example is Colonel Tiul'panov in Germany, whose harrying of the Christian Democratic Union received

were hardly free from blame. Too often they could not control their desires to dominate and to exact revenge. Of no one was his truer than Dimitrov, who, though he had long administered the national-front strategy from Moscow with counsels of moderation, proved a perfect thug upon his return to Bulgaria.<sup>89</sup>

## CONCLUSION: THE FAILURE OF THE NATIONAL FRONT STRATEGY AND THE ORIGINS OF THE COLD WAR

The records of Stalin's conversations with European Communists and the *OMI*'s instructions to the European Communist Parties to establish that by spring 1943 the Kremlin had developed and begun to execute a consistent political strategy designed to establish Communist-dominated coalition regimes in Eastern Europe in the near term and, over the longer term, to foster the development of the Communist movement in Western Europe. As regards Eastern Europe, the strategy was not a response to Western initiatives in the sense of being a defensive reaction to Anglo-American intrusions into the Soviet sphere. Chronology alone precludes that. The national-front strategy was in place by April 1943. Yet from March 1942, when Roosevelt explained to the Soviet ambassador that he would not oppose the USSR's demands for the reestablishment of its western borders of June 1941 through Autumn of 1944, when the United States and Great Britain accepted Soviet draft armistice agreements for Germany's satellites, the Western Allies deferred to the Soviets in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.<sup>90</sup> Neither was the

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severe criticism in Moscow. Naimark, "The Soviets and the Christian Democrats," 46, 48, 52.

<sup>89</sup> See, for example, Dimitrov, "Revolution Released," 276-87.

<sup>90</sup> Cable, M. Litvinov to V. M. Molotov, 12 March 1942, *Sovyetsko-amerikanskiye Otnosheniya vo Vremya Velikoi Otechestvennoi Voiniy*, 1:155-57. The American policy of deference to a Soviet sphere of influence -- provided that certain limits were observed -- was calculated. See Eduard Mark, "American Policy toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War, 1941-1946: An Alternative Interpretation," *The Journal of American History*, 68 (September 1981), 313-336. Nothing set the tone so much as the Moscow Conference of Foreign Ministers (October 1943) where the United States declined to support the minimal program of guarantees for Eastern Europe that Eden had brought with him. Eden, once aware of the lack of American support, set about out-accommodating the Americans. The reader can do no better than to read Keith Sainsbury's meticulous account of the negotiations in Moscow: *The Turning Point: Roosevelt, Stalin, Churchill, and Chiang-Kai-Shek, 1943: The Moscow, Cairo, and*



national-front strategy and its goal of ultimate sovietization a response to the “anti-Soviet” sentiments of the USSR’s neighbors.<sup>91</sup> On the contrary, the basic premise of the strategy was that the peoples of Eastern Europe and the Balkans could be won over by appropriate policies to such an extent that Communist dominated regimes could introduce socialism under conditions of “bourgeois democracy.”

The intricate question of Stalin’s motives properly belongs to the realm of biography. Objectively, however, his policies during and after World War II amounted to “National Bolshevism”—the use of the Soviet state as an agent of revolutionary change.<sup>92</sup> Stalin himself said as much in 1940: “The action of the Red Army is also a matter of world revolution.”<sup>93</sup> At that time, his approach to revolution was brutally direct: Where the Red Army trod, there followed almost immediately sovietization, mass-murder, and deportations. The methods of the national-front strategy, conditioned as they were by the politics of alliance, were very different from those of 1940, though the ends were not. They also differed from the methods to which the

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*Teheran Conferences.* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Cavendish Cannon, chief of the State Department’s Office of Southern European Affairs explained to a representative of the Office of Strategic Services, “that the President did not want us to interfere in the Balkan affairs; that was the understanding reached at the Moscow Conference, which Mr. Cannon attended . . . .” Memorandum by Bernard Yarrow, 26 June 1944, subj: “Report on Shepherd Project,” NARA, RG 226, Entry 160, box 26.

<sup>91</sup> This, of course, has long been the favorite argument of those who have argued that Stalin proceeded as he did in Eastern Europe out of sheer necessity and a concern for “security.”

<sup>92</sup> The idea that Stalin had transformed revolution “from below” into “revolution from above” was already common by the end of World War II. One able exponent was the Russian emigre David J. Dallin. Robert C. Tucker has also argued for a similar interpretation, as have, more recently, the Russian historians Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov and the American scholar, John L. Gaddis: Eduard Mark, “October or Thermidor: Interpretations of Stalinism and the Perception of Soviet Foreign Policy in the United States, 1927-1947.” *The American Historical Review*, 94 October 1989), 937-962.; Robert C. Tucker, “Stalinism as Revolution from Above,” in Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Stalinism: Essays in Historical Interpretation* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1977), esp. 105-97; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin in Power: The Revolution from Above, 1928-1941* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 45-50; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1996), 15-16, 19, 34-35, 45, 68, 111; John L. Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (New York: Oxford University Press), 13-14, 29-31, 290.

<sup>93</sup> Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 188 (21 January 1940). Dimitrov expressed essentially the same idea when he wrote at the time of the dissolution of the Comintern that the action would “strengthen the communist parties as national workers’ parties and at the same time will strengthen the internationalism of the popular masses, whose base is the Soviet Union.” *Ibid.*, 375 (21 May 1943)

Soviets and their protégés ultimately resorted when the attractive powers of the national-front strategy proved to be vastly less than the Kremlin had supposed.

The Soviet Union's postwar shift from a comparatively short-lived strategy of political attraction to enduring repression has made it hard for historians to understand Stalin's policy in Eastern Europe. Orthodox historians of the Cold War have tended to assume that since the Soviets had their armies in Eastern Europe, events must have fallen out as they wished—that is, Stalin wanted Communist regimes and he got them in short order. It is now evident, however, that he originally envisioned a process of sovietization very different from the overt and brutal intrusions known to history. As befitted a man who believed that history was on his side, Stalin was initially patient and flexible. He believed that the interests of the Soviet state required the continuance for a while of the Grand Alliance—presumably until the capitalist world again lapsed into economic crisis, creating new opportunities for the further expansion of communism beyond the limits of the Red Army's wartime advances.<sup>94</sup> He planned, accordingly, that socialism should come to Eastern Europe through means more or less acceptable both to the West and to the inhabitants of the region. Ironically, the Cold War developed as it did largely because Stalin's national front policy *failed* on its own terms. When the national front strategy began to miscarry, the Soviets and the local Communist parties resorted to forms of force and fraud that alienated the people whose loyalties the strategy had been designed to win. Worse, repression in Eastern Europe did much to sunder the alliance that the strategy was supposed to preserve by alarming the Western states into believing the worst about Soviet intentions, which in turn made them bolder in their support of anti-Communist forces in Eastern Europe. Stalin succeeded in bringing socialism to Eastern Europe, but sooner than he had planned, by methods different from those he had preferred, and at a cost he had hoped not to pay.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> For Soviet confidence in 1945-46 of a near-term economic crisis in the West, see Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance*, 116-17.

<sup>95</sup> I wish to stress at this point that I do not offer this as a complete explanation for the origins of the Cold War. At least two additional developments were necessary for Western anxieties about the Soviets to reach critical mass: Stalin's pressures on Iran and Turkey in 1946 and the return to ideological orthodoxy in Soviet domestic propaganda in 1946, one feature of which was the resurrection of the "capitalist encirclement." The reasons for this appear to

Some scholars, who have long doubted that Stalin was greatly interested in revolutionizing

Eastern Europe, have seized upon the evidence of his desire for continued alliance with the West as proof of their revisionist convictions regarding the origins of the Cold War. Their argument in essence is: Since the sovietization of Eastern Europe as it actually occurred was plainly incompatible with cooperative relations with the United States and Britain, Stalin cannot have desired it until forced upon the course by Anglo–American interference or the “anti–Soviet” sentiments of his neighbors.<sup>96</sup> This argument however overlooks the slow, stage–by–stage pace with which the national-front strategy unfolded and, equally important, ignores the relatively unobjectionable methods it was to employ.

Had the national-front strategy succeeded, the postwar confrontation might have been avoided—or assumed a less threatening form. For if the national-front regimes of Eastern Europe had become sufficiently popular to avoid the extreme measures to which almost all soon resorted, the region need not have become the source of discord between East and West. There would simply have been little to which the Anglo–Americans could have taken exception. Alternatively, when it became clear that the peoples of Eastern Europe were not going to rally to the national fronts, Stalin might have abided by their will and contented himself with protecting the military security of the Soviet Union through arrangements for the demilitarization of Germany and her former satellites, and with regional security pacts and bilateral defensive pacts like the one concluded with Czechoslovakia in 1943. All these possibilities came up for discussion during the war, and the United States and Britain eventually signaled their willingness to accept them. Stalin’s own diplomats discussed them as feasible options.<sup>97</sup>

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have been entirely domestic, but because western observers of the Soviet scene tended to deduce the motives of Soviet foreign policies from developments inside the USSR, the ideological reversion resonated powerfully in the West. See Mark, “October or Thermidor,” 956-57, 961-62

<sup>96</sup> See, for example, Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity*, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Mastny, *Russia’s Road to the Cold War*, 231-32; Pechatnov, “The Big Three After World War II.”

Beginning in the fall of 1945, moreover, Secretary of States James F. Byrnes offered the Soviets a comprehensive settlement by which Stalin would have accepted domestic self-determination for the nations of Eastern Europe in exchange for a treaty of demilitarization for Germany, severe limitations on the size of the armed forces of Germany's former satellites, and a recognized right of intervention in the former German satellites to enforce the terms of the peace treaties and to put down to resurgences of fascism or militarism.<sup>98</sup>

Yet Stalin's response to the failure of the national-front strategy to win over the peoples of Eastern Europe was first to condone and then to encourage extremes of repression that, with other developments, aroused everywhere fear of his purposes. Why, then, valuing as he did continued association with the West, did Stalin choose the enforced socialization of Eastern Europe over alliance when there existed other ways of guaranteeing Soviet interests in the region?

For Stalin, the value of the alliance with the United States and Britain was relative and contingent. He saw the alliance between the communist and capitalist worlds as a temporarily useful truce. Not long before Yalta he said to Dimitrov, "The crisis of capitalism led to the division of the capitalists into two factions—the one fascist, the other democratic. . . . We are today with one faction against the other, but in the future we shall also be against that faction of capitalists."<sup>99</sup> His suspicions of the dynamics of capitalism, rooted as they were in the Marxist–Leninist theory of imperialism, were too great for him to hold any other view. The Americans and the British wanted to dominate the world economically, he told Thorez, in November 1944 that was why the rascals were bombing Germany with such enthusiasm!<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Mark, "American Policy toward Eastern Europe and the Origins of the Cold War," 329-31.

<sup>99</sup> Dimitrov, *Dnevnik*, 462. (Entry of 19 January 1945).

<sup>100</sup> "“Anglichanye i Amerikantziy xotyat vezde sozdat' reaktzionnyie pravitel'ctva.”” In the Soviet view, the very same capitalist contradictions that Moscow hoped to exploit to its advantage -- and which it expected to grow more intense -- bore within themselves the virtual certainty of war. The danger of war was in the first instance between the capitalist powers. But it was also possible that the capitalist states would seek to resolve their conflicts through an attack on the USSR. Another strand of thought was that as the Soviet Union became stronger, the danger from the capitalists would grow ever greater as the latter took alarm. Paradoxical as it may seem, these postulates suggested that the USSR was entering a dangerous period at the end of World War II, although the Soviets also believed that

The value of a socialized Eastern Europe for Stalin was, by contrast, absolute in two ways. It was, explicitly, the ultimate aim of his policies in Eastern Europe—an aim deeply rooted in his regime’s ideology and his personal beliefs. From his Marxist–Leninist perspective, moreover, it was obviously more prudent that the military security of the USSR should ultimately be entrusted to a glacis of socialized states in Eastern Europe than to agreements with capitalist states that he viewed as intrinsically predatory potential enemies. *They*, not the shattered Germany, were the chief source of his fears for the future.<sup>101</sup>

The chief deterrent to Stalin’s reordering of Eastern Europe unilaterally after the fashion of 1940 was the expectation that significance advantages would accrue in the shorter term from continued association with the West. Two processes, which began to work almost simultaneously soon after the war, disabused him of this hope. The weakness of the national fronts became apparent, presenting him with a stark choice of either seeing Eastern Europe fall into the hands of non- communist political parties or else resorting to repression inimical to continued alliance with the United States and Britain. At the same time, Western positions at the meetings of the Council of Foreign Ministers and at the Paris Peace Conference increasingly showed Stalin that he had invested excessively in his hopes for continued alliance with the Western democracies. Washington soon decided that it would not extend economic aid or even credits to the USSR. The Americans also showed that they were not disposed to allow the Soviets any real say in the occupation of Japan, even though their own actions in Eastern Europe were becoming more intrusive. Britain, with the complete backing of the United States, refused even to consider the Soviet request for a trusteeship in Africa. Stalin’s most ambitious attempt to play upon the presumed imperialist rivalries between Britain and America—an elaborately orchestrated campaign of intimidation against Turkey—almost ended in disaster. He had to retreat after the British and the Americans, drawing together and acting as one, supported

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their growing strength might reduce the likelihood of their being attacked. See Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance*, 43-46, 51-53, 64.

<sup>101</sup> See *ibid*, 85-88.

the Turks strongly and even began joint planning for war against the USSR, a fact that his intelligence services seem to have reported to him.<sup>102</sup> The refusal of the British and the Americans to grant him what he wished in their sphere of influence, and their disinclination to be set against each other, had great consequences. Stalin's reasons for maintaining the alliance gradually evaporated. That, in turn, removed the chief inhibition against the use of methods to consolidate the faltering "popular democracies" of Eastern Europe that were faster and cruder than Moscow had envisioned in its wartime instructions to the region's Communists.

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Eduard Mark is a historian with the U.S. Air Force History Office.

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<sup>102</sup> Eduard Mark, "The War Scare of 1946 and Its Consequences," *Diplomatic History*, 21 (Summer 1997), 383-415. My own reading of his episode is that Stalin pursued his demands against Turkey not only for their own sake but also to demonstrate to the British that they should reach an accommodation with Moscow independent of the Americans. Soviet diplomats in Washington had reported that the Americans would not support the British in the Middle East because they pursued their own imperialistic ambitions in the region.