

*Leadership Transition
in a Fractured Bloc*

Featuring:

CPSU Plenums; Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and the Crisis in East Germany; Stalin and the Soviet-Yugoslav Split; Deng Xiaoping and Sino-Soviet Relations; The End of the Cold War: A Preview

The Cold War International History Project

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Photo on cover: From left to right: Anastas Mikoian, Nikita Khrushchev, Iosif Stalin, Georgii Malenkov, Lavrentii Beria, and Viacheslav Molotov.

From Zubok, Vladislav and Konstantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*. Copyright ©1996 by Harvard University Press. Photo printed with permission from the Russian State Archive of Film and Photodocuments, Krasnogorsk.

“We [the CC CPSU Presidium members] were all stunned, though we knew much
And now it all was verified and confirmed by documents.”

A. I. Mikoian *Memoirs*¹

Leadership Transition in a Fractured Bloc : Editor's Note

On 1 March 1953, I.V. Stalin retired from a late night feast with Comrades Beria, Bulganin, Khrushchev and Malenkov to read some top secret files.² The first told him that the Soviet gold reserve had reached 2049 tons. The second was bad news: despite imaginative efforts, Soviet organs had failed to “rub out” (*skovyrmut*) Tito.³ In the course of the following few hours, Stalin himself was laid low by a stroke. On 5 March 1953, with Stalin in a terminal coma, an emergency plenary session (*plenium*) of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CC CPSU) was called. The mood was somber and the final resolution focused on one point.⁴

In connection with Comrade Stalin's serious illness, which means his longer or shorter non-participation in leadership [duties], to consider the most important party and government task during Comrade Stalin's absence to be the unbroken, correct leadership of the country, which in turn requires complete leadership unity and the impermissibility of any kind of division or panic.

Stalin did not tarry long, dying that very night at 9:50, but the succession crises, against which the plenum had warned, dragged on for years.

This period of “collective leadership,” as it was known, also defined a new era of the Cold War. Whether for reasons of state, matters of principle or simply convenient pretext, decisions on current foreign policy and interpretations of past decisions became linked to the personal political fortunes of a series of top leaders. The falls of Beria, Malenkov, Molotov, Zhukov, and finally Khrushchev himself are linked to such key Cold War topics as the German question, nuclear strategy, Yugoslavia, “Open Skies” and the Cuban Missile Crisis, respectively. With the West, hesitancy gave way to renewed hostility.⁵ Insecure and changing leadership in the Kremlin was a poor base on which to try and build *détente*. Stalin was gone, but the nature of the succession to his autocratic regime guaranteed long life to the Cold War.

Several sections of this *Cold War International History Project Bulletin 10* cover the immediate post-Stalin period from a variety of angles. The **Plenums** section presents excerpted transcripts from three gatherings of the CC CPSU at which bitter words of leadership disagreement were spoken in the interstices of foreign policy debate. In addition, new materials on Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in a “secret speech” to the 20th

Party Congress on 25 February 1956 show the exclusively domestic concerns driving a decision that would have fateful consequences for the international Communist movement and, in particular, the Sino-Soviet relationship. The origins of the speech are documented with such important Russian sources as Malin notes⁶ and the Mikoian diary, while the Polish archives provide an impromptu “second secret speech” by Khrushchev to the Polish sixth party plenum in March 1956. Here Khrushchev describes in some detail Stalin's “persecution complex” and its dark consequences.⁷

The **Berlin 1953** section presents multiple perspectives from German, Russian and Hungarian archives on this earliest East-bloc uprising against Communist rule, quashed in a day by Soviet occupation forces stationed in Germany. Unlike 1956 in Hungary and 1968 in Czechoslovakia, no invasion was necessary. To broaden perspective even further, materials come from party, military and state sources. On the actual day of maximum unrest, June 17, coverage becomes almost hourly thanks to the frequent reporting schedule of the Russian military authorities repressing the “disorders.” Other highlights are Beria's groveling, unheeded pleas from prison to old associates in the Presidium, following his arrest in late June (he was shot in December 1953) and the remarkable meeting, literally on the eve of the German uprising, between Soviet and Hungarian leaderships that shows reforms being suggested to Budapest that are in perfect parallel with the New Course pressed on Berlin. Soviet plans for internal change were bloc-wide in scope.⁸

The **Yugoslavia** section examines the first fracture in the Communist bloc and the special role played by the Southern Slavs in both Stalinist and post-Stalinist international relations. Possibly, the most exciting materials in this section are Stalin's conversations with Yugoslav and Bulgarian leaders in 1946 and 1948, with detailed introduction and notes by Leonid Gibianskii. These Stalin conversations, together with others (Mao Zedong, Wilhelm Pieck, Kim Il Sung) published in previous *CWIHP Bulletins*, are part of a growing body of material on Stalin being assembled by CWIHP. It would be hard to pick any single individual more important to this period and yet remarkably little is known about Stalin as a Cold War statesman. Much material remains bottled up in the Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation. Control of Stalin's archive was considered a perquisite of highest office in Soviet times and the practice continues. It remains unclear, however, how much material there really is, since Stalin did not like note-taking. But he did like to talk.⁹ As Averell Harriman said in Stalin's presence when escorting Harry Hopkins on a mission to convince the

aging dictator to help salvage the deteriorating Grand Alliance: 10

President Truman had sent him [Hopkins] to have the kind of frank talk with Marshal Stalin that we all know Marshal Stalin liked to have.

The two Stalin conversations in this *Bulletin* show the dictator in two moods, in two roles. Other talks show other facets. Scholars in possession of transcripts, memcons, reports and memoir materials in any language on Stalin's meetings with top leaders in the period 1939-1953 are invited to contribute and send them to CWIHP by mail or FAX. The 3-4 October 1997 Stalin Workshop in Budapest and the 19-20 March 1998 Moscow Workshop will be followed by other Stalin events.

The section on the **End of the Cold War** is also the overture to a larger project, jointly planned with the National Security Archive at George Washington University and leading to commemorative activities and publications in 1999-2001. The nearness of the events to be covered will almost certainly inspire controversy.¹¹ This issue of the *Bulletin* aims only to raise the thorny question of dating the Cold War's demise by publishing two sets of documents that offer divergent perspectives from different regions of the world, Southeast Europe and Northeast Asia. The Soviet Foreign Ministry's presentation to the American Ambassador of the "Brezhnev doctrine" as a gift on Christmas Eve, 24 December 1989, bears note as a key symbolic turning point. The Cherniaev excerpt, previously available to Japanese readers only, reveals the long and laborious process by which Gorbachev tried to change the insular nature of Soviet-Japanese relations, but he ran out of time.

The **Deng** section invokes the memory of the late paramount leader of the PRC by shedding light on his role in Sino-Soviet affairs between 1956 and 1963, the very years when fraternal relations were breaking down. Was renewed entente possible even as late as 1962? Did a group within the CCP leadership favor this option, even counter to Mao Zedong's views? These are crucial questions for understanding the ultimate end of Sino-Soviet cooperation, the origins of the Cultural Revolution and the prehistory of the Strategic Triangle. Just as *Bulletins 6-9* and the CWIHP conference at the University of Hong Kong in January 1996 focused attention on Sino-Soviet disagreements regarding the Korean War, even at the height of the two regimes' intimacy, *Bulletin 10* and the October 1997 Beijing conference co-sponsored by CWIHP (See pp.6-7) highlight documents on persistent themes and practices of unity, where the powers of hindsight would emphasize ineluctable discord. Once again, access to East-bloc documents shows that these historical processes were much more complex and multi-sided than previous analysts have portrayed them (or indeed, *could* portray them in the absence of archival access). Of course, many aspects are still unclear and the

documentation is far from complete.

Research Notes on Soviet intelligence and documents on nuclear weapons in Cuba and China, among others, conclude *Bulletin 10*. Andropov's 1967 report, his first as KGB Chairman, gives us an inside overview of the world's largest intelligence agency charged with both domestic and foreign responsibilities. For millions, the Cold War is synonymous with nuclear terror. In this *Bulletin* the moment of purest dread (at least for Americans) comes on page 225, when the Soviet rocket forces on Cuba are ordered to "be prepared, following a signal from Moscow, to deal a nuclear missile strike to the most important targets in the United States of America."

The next to last article leads off a series of CWIHP publications dealing with Ukraine. Together with the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies, CWIHP has begun a Kyiv initiative. It was almost axiomatic among sovietologists that the Soviet Union could not survive the loss of Ukraine. Khrushchev, who served as Party boss there in the 1930s and 1940s, and then went on to become General Secretary in Moscow, certainly thought so. In his concluding remarks to the July 1955 CC CPSU plenum, Khrushchev exclaimed: ¹²

If someone set us such conditions: to separate the Russians from the Ukrainians or Belorussians, what would we say? We would say, without pausing for thought: You take your proposals to the mother of God (*k bozhei materi*).

The first installment on the Ukrainian initiative is Mark Kramer's presentation of the diary of Politburo member, Petro Shelest, who served simultaneously as Ukrainian Communist Party First Secretary. This top-level source adds a whole new subplot to the history of the Prague Spring, while highlighting the largely unexplored importance of Ukraine (and Slovakia) in the Cold War.¹³

1997 has been a busy year at the Cold War Project. In addition to serving as organizer or lead co-organizer of conferences/workshops in Beijing, Budapest, Warsaw and Washington, CWIHP put up a new website at:

cwihip.si.edu.

The ease and availability of web use as a reference tool has risen greatly in the past five years. Furthermore, as CWIHP-published materials multiply, the information becomes much more accessible via electronic search than in print. The inclusion below of the Gromyko-Vance talks of 28-30 March 1977 illustrates the division of labor. One printed *Bulletin* page is devoted to excerpts and overview, while the *Electronic Bulletin* carries the twenty-page full text. Of course, those who want to read hardcopy should feel free to download and reproduce. CWIHP is committed

to helping all those who want to read our electronic publications up onto the web.

It is traditional at this point to make acknowledgements, although I know I do not have enough space to name all those who have contributed to this *Bulletin* and *Electronic Bulletin*. First of all, I want to thank Dean Anderson, George Bowen, Joe Brinley, Sam Crivello, Rob Litwak, John Martinez, Michael O'Brien, and the Smithsonian Institution, without whom the website would have never happened. Christian Ostermann was the best Co-editor and Associate Director one could wish for. Christa Sheehan Matthew deserves full credit for the greatly improved appearance, layout, and French translations. I am grateful to Andrew Grauer for putting up with some unusual scheduling. Benjamin Aldrich-Moodie is the name that appears most often in this *Bulletin*, because he translated much more than his share. Without Tom Blanton, CHEN Jian, Leo Gluchowski, Mark Kramer, Odd Arne Westad, and Vlad Zubok, I might have despaired of finally getting the *Bulletin* out. Without Jim and Annie Hershberg, I certainly would have.

Wishing everybody happy archival hunting in 1998.

David Wolff, Editor
CWIHP Bulletin and *CWIHP Electronic Bulletin*.

¹ A. I. Mikoian, the longest serving member of the Presidium/Politburo (1926-1966), wrote these words in reaction to the presentation to the Presidium of the (P.N.) Pospelov report, the first detailed, documented study of Stalin's mass slaughter of Party cadres. For more on this, see Naumov and Gluchowski articles below. Mikoian's *Memoirs* are cited as Presidential Archive of the Russian Federation (AP RF), f. 39, op.3, d.120, although it appears that the file has actually already been transferred to the Russian Center for the Storage and Study of Contemporary Documentation (RTsKhIDNI) in preparation for declassification.

² Stalin was a night owl and, therefore, so were his minions. On the abolition of nocturnal summonses under Khrushchev, see John Gaddis, *We Now Know* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1997), p. 206.

³ On the assassination plans, see p.137 below.

⁴ The materials of the March 1953 plenums can be found in TsKhSD (Storage Center for Contemporary Documentation), f.2, op.1, dd.23-26; Additional materials are available on Reel 7 of the Volkogonov papers in an article draft entitled "Smert' Stalina" (Library of Congress, Manuscript Collection); Qualified medical personnel had become scarce after Stalin took to torturing his doctors, an ultimately effective, though indirect, way for one of history's greater tyrants to hasten his own end.

⁵ Vojtech Mastny has recently argued in his Beer-prize winning book (see p. 74 below) that only "irresistible Western pressure" coinciding with internal crisis might have caused significant change in the Kremlin's policies. See Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1996), p. 190.

⁶ V. N. Malin was head of the General Department of the CC CPSU under Khrushchev and kept detailed notes of Presidium discussions and decisions. For his notes on the crises of 1956 in

Poland and Hungary, see Mark Kramer, "New Evidence on Soviet Decision-Making and the 1956 Polish and Hungarian Crises" *CWIHP Bulletin* 8-9, pp. 358-410. This is also the longest *CWIHP Bulletin* article of all time.

⁷ Of course, we should not forget that if Khrushchev, in attacking Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov can allow himself to mock the whole Soviet diplomatic corps by saying, "that is what it means to be a diplomat—he sees, and I don't see anything. (laughter in the hall)," any bickering over foreign policy issues may actually mask a personal attack on the Foreign Minister or his institutional stronghold, the "MID." For quote, see p. 42 below.

⁸ To a certain extent, it appears that the Soviet Presidium was trying to replicate its own "collective" nature in other East-bloc countries by removing the Stalinist party chieftains, who had ruled the fraternal parties in a dictatorial manner. In the Hungarian document, Matyas Rakosi, Hungary's mini-Stalin, was forced to humble himself with such comments as: "Regarding hubris, that's an illness that one can not detect, just like one can not smell one's own odor." On the scope of change, Molotov was most direct: "The comrades had a chance to become convinced that even though we are talking about Hungary, this issue is not only Hungary, but all the peoples' democracies." (See pp. 85, 83 below.)

⁹ This is not to say that Stalin was loquacious. It is unimaginable that Stalin would speak for hours impromptu like Khrushchev (pp. 44ff. below) or Gorbachev (pp. 196 ff.).

¹⁰ On the Hopkins mission, see William Taubman, *Stalin's American Policy: From Entente to Détente to Cold War* (New York, 1982), pp. 101, 103-7. The Harriman quote comes from a memorandum of conversation for the 26 May 1945 meeting between Hopkins and Stalin held in Box 179 of the Harriman Papers in the Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress. The editor is grateful to Jim Hershberg for locating and providing this document.

¹¹ Examples of such discussions are: "The Kramer-Blight et al. Debate on Tactical Nuclear Weapons in Cuba" (*Bulletin* 3), "The Sudoplatov Controversy on Atomic Espionage" (*Bulletins* 4, 5), and "The Cumings-Weathersby Exchange on Korean War Origins" (*Bulletin* 6-7).

¹² See p. 43 below.

¹³ In Summer 1997, a CWIHP delegation consisting of Jim Hershberg, Mark Kramer, David Wolff and Vladislav Zubok visited the archives of Chisinau (Kishinev), Kyiv, Riga, and Vilnius, where over 8000 pages of materials (often unavailable in Moscow) were gathered. These will be an important resource in the preparation of planned *CWIHP Bulletins* on "Intelligence and the Cold War," "Nationalism and the Cold War," and "The End of the Cold War," as well as for additional publications on Cold War crises in Central and Eastern Europe.

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