Communist Bloc Expansion in the Early Cold War: Challenging Realism, Refuting Revisionism

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Was there ever a unified communist threat facing the United States during the Cold War? Or did U.S. decision-makers misperceive Soviet and communist bloc “defensiveness” and “caution” as expansionist threats? Did U.S. leaders, realizing that the Soviets and their ideological allies posed no security threat to the United States and its allies, create such claims for various domestic political reasons? Such questions have dominated analyses of the Cold War in the United States for the past thirty years. To the surprise of some and the consternation of others, the demise of the Cold War and the resulting flow of new evidence from the East in recent years has reinvigorated many of these arguments over its origins, the primary responsibility for its creation, and U.S. actions during that era. The Cold War is over, but the controversies surrounding it and its meaning for contemporary scholarship and policy are not.

The argument over the origins of the Cold War is important not only for historical accuracy, but also for the consequences it will have on theoretical questions and therefore on their implications for policy. Since international relations specialists both learn from historical examples and utilize them as illustration and evidence, historical accounts and their relative plausibility directly influence social science theories. As the late William T.R. Fox used to tell his students, good history will not necessarily lead to good theory, but poor

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history will lead to poor theory. History lays the groundwork for the creation, testing, and improvement of international theories.

This article utilizes some of the new historical treatments of evidence emerging from the East to re-examine the validity of Western perceptions of Soviet bloc expansion in the early Cold War. It begins with a discussion of the major schools of historical thought on the Cold War and their respective views on communist expansion: traditionalism, revisionism, post-revisionism, and realism. I maintain that many of the new interpretations of the Cold War based on the new evidence support a traditional explanation and pose a challenge to the other schools of thought. Supporting evidence is provided by recent British and European scholarship on Western threat perceptions during the Cold War. I then examine two empirical questions: did a relatively hierarchical and unified Communist bloc exist under the leadership of the Soviet Union? If so, were the perceptions of Western decision-makers accurate, that such a bloc was expansionist along coordinated lines largely directed from Moscow? I answer both questions in the affirmative. The first answer is based on the ample circumstantial evidence utilized by traditionalists in the past. The second answer relies on new interpretations and primary evidence that strongly support the earlier traditionalist claims. Taken together, the supporting, circumstantial, and new primary evidence provide a compelling argument that the traditional explanation of the Cold War is superior to the competing explanations.

A case study of the bloc’s interventions in Asia explores in greater detail the question of bloc solidarity. With Europe and the Middle East denied them as targets of opportunity by 1948, the Soviets turned to Asia. I argue that Soviet attempts to expand into the region were made, not in response to Western threats, as security dilemma critiques of containment suggest, but because of the lack of such a threat, that is, the lack of a unified Western containment policy. Moreover, Soviet bloc actions in Asia strongly suggest that had robust containment policies not been followed in Europe and the Middle East, the Soviets would have tried to expand their influence into those areas also. The new evidence suggests that we need to modify many of the negative views of Western threat perceptions during the Cold War, widespread criticisms of robust containment policies, and the ubiquitous but incorrect view of the Soviet Union as an inherently cautious imperial power.

2. I do not examine the question of which areas of the world were objectively important to the national interests of the United States and its allies, only the narrower, yet related, question of whether there existed expansionist Soviet bloc policies.
The Historical Debate over U.S. Policies: Traditionalism, Revisionism, Post-Revisionism, and Realism

As with many historical events, a Hegelian pattern of argumentation—thesis or traditional view, antithesis or revisionist view, and synthesis or post-revisionist view—developed for analyses of the Cold War. The traditional view of the Cold War held that the Soviet Union was an expansionist nation primarily responsible for political and military contention, and that there was a real and global communist threat to independent but internally weak nations, both those that ringed the Soviet Union in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia in the aftermath of World War II and the emerging new nations. U.S. security policies were therefore mostly reasonable and necessary, or at the least understandable and defensible. The Soviet Union, according to this view, headed a grouping of ideologically like-minded revolutionary entities and nations that were actively expansionist through the selective support of non-ruling communist parties in their quests for power. The essence of the early Cold War was that the Soviet Union and its ideological clients were united and expansionist, and that the United States was relatively slow in reacting to the global nature of the threat posed by that expansion. It was only checked when the West, and especially the United States, took strong, unified stands against the Soviet Union to contain it.3

Beginning in the mid-1960s, largely in reaction to the Vietnam War, a revisionist school evolved among U.S. historians who proposed that the United States was primarily to blame for the Cold War. U.S. leaders were driven by an unreasonable hostility to communism, largely generated by domestic political and economic needs. Since the Soviets had at most only tenuous influence over communist groups, U.S. actions during the Cold War, especially in the Third World, were unnecessary and overdone, even at times criminal. In this view, the United States was seen as actively expansionist, while the Soviet Union was simply responding to U.S. provocations. These starkly drawn

arguments affected much of U.S. historiography of the Cold War until the 1980s. In general, traditional analysis defended U.S. and Western containment policies; revisionism rejected them.4

In the later years of the Cold War, there were attempts to forge a post-revisionist synthesis by historians, the foremost among them John Lewis Gaddis.5 The post-revisionists essentially accepted U.S. European policy while separating it sharply from U.S. Third World policies. This allowed them to avoid having to defend the Vietnam War and other policies of which they disapproved. They accepted some U.S. responsibility for the Cold War and were strongly critical of U.S. interventions in the developing nations, for example, yet found credible the Soviet threat to Europe and Japan. The post-revisionists tried to strike a balance between traditionalism and revisionism and to stake out a middle ground based on mutual misperception, mutual reactivity, and shared responsibility between the superpowers. Borrowing insights from the psychological decision-making and realist literatures in political science, there was sometimes a strong emphasis on a supposedly consistent misperception of political and power realities by all concerned.

Some historians who reject the traditional stance from an allegedly realist or post-revisionist perspective, such as historian Melvyn Leffler in his award-winning history of the origins of the Cold War, *A Preponderance of Power*, have also fixed primary blame for the globalization of the Cold War on U.S. anti-communism and the resulting flawed processes of determining threats. The Cold War, according to Leffler, was largely caused by the actions of the United States, with the Soviets largely responding defensively to U.S. initiatives: “Soviet actions were reactive.”⁶ Although Leffler at times ascribes mutuality of

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responsibility to the superpowers, Anders Stephanson correctly notes that in this widely acclaimed work, "the case is closed: the United States initiated the Cold War, the Soviet Union did not."7

Post-revisionism was supported in important ways by the criticisms of U.S. policies emanating from the dominant paradigm of the political science sub-discipline of international relations, realism, which posits the non-ideological pursuit of power as the basis for international relations. According to realists, it is the competition over capabilities among states that determines policies. This view suggests that the spread of communism presented little threat to the United States because nationalism and self-interest, not communist ideology, are what drive states to act. Nationalism prevented a coordination of international policies by these governments. The actions of each are therefore only properly understood *sui generis*. There was no Soviet bloc unified by ideology in the early Cold War period, according to this view; there were only discrete states seeking individual versions of their national interests defined in terms of power.8 Such a state of anarchy in international politics produces the security dilemma: each state is ultimately left to its own resources to protect itself, but as each tries to do so it alarms other states that are also seeking to protect themselves. Realist analysts portray a world of endemic misperceptions within the context of the constant struggle over power.9 This view complements the post-revisionist view of mutual reactivity between the superpowers and joint responsibility in the early Cold War.

In this debate, the traditionalist position has been under-represented in recent decades and dealt with as a straw man. Historiographic discussions rarely mention traditionalist works written after 1970, and those prior to that year are often portrayed as "of mostly archaeological interest now."10 This has recently begun to change. Largely drawing on the unprecedented level of materials being declassified and released from communist archives, as well as increasingly candid interviews with policymakers of the former Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, new interpretations are emerging that can be characterized as traditionalist in orientation, in their views on the new

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empirical findings if not yet in analytical and historiographical coherence.\textsuperscript{11} Divergent interpretations of the Cold War are again in lively contention.

The primary reason for this resurgence of the traditional viewpoint is that a good deal of the new evidence has not been kind to post-revisionist, realist, and especially revisionist analyses. It turns out that even ardent U.S. Cold-Warriors such as John Foster Dulles were far more sophisticated in their view of the communist threat than their public rhetoric would suggest; that ideology was an important factor in decision-making for the Soviet Union and its potential allies, especially in the early Cold War, and that the communist world coordinated expansionist policies far more than believed by many critics of U.S. policies. This is creating a new look at how U.S. decision-makers perceived threats during the Cold War.\textsuperscript{12} Some post-revisionist analysts have partly incorporated these insights into their work. John Lewis Gaddis, for example, has recently declared that “American policy-makers at no point during the postwar era actually believed in the existence of an international communist monolith.”\textsuperscript{13} Some new interpretations suggest that U.S. and Western decision-makers


were not that far off in their perceptions of the threat posed by the Soviet bloc, at least in the early period. Even the common view that NSC 68 was an irrational call to arms based on pure ideology, or a cynical ploy to scare people, is being questioned by some scholars, and that document is being portrayed as a more rational depiction of actual threats facing the West than previously believed.14

In sum, traditionalists portray the Soviet Union as an expansionist, ideologically driven power and the West as primarily reactive; revisionists argue that the Soviets were reactive, and the United States expansionist; post-revisionists, while assigning some responsibility for the Cold War to Soviet expansionist pressures, often place equal or greater blame on the United States; realists portray the Soviets as highly reactive because of the security dilemma, and therefore generally defensive and cautious. Determining whether the Soviet Union was an actively expansionist power is thus essential to ascertaining responsibility for the origins of the Cold War, the plausibility of Western threat perceptions, the accuracy of realist theories, and the defensibility of the resulting containment policies.

Supporting Evidence: Bringing the Allies Back In

Although many critics of the Cold War concentrate their attention on alleged U.S. misperceptions of Soviet expansion, it is worth noting that most other non-communist nations shared these perceptions in the early Cold War with unusual consensus. This included not only governments but also many groups not afraid to criticize the United States or to attempt to get along with the Soviets, such as the British Labour Party or the French Socialists. Even such an unexpected source as Bertrand Russell wondered aloud whether a preemptive attack on Stalin might not be necessary in the 1940s.15 This particularly challenges those analysts who utilize cognitive theories of decision-making and

domestic politics explanations for U.S. foreign policy. Many such critics emphasize Soviet defensiveness, caution, and decidedly limited aims, disparaging the very notion of a unified communist bloc.\textsuperscript{16}

British and other allied threat perceptions were often higher than U.S. fears prior to the Korean War, both in Europe and in the periphery. This phenomenon cannot be explained by reference to internal U.S. psychological or political processes. Indeed, in congruence with traditionalist interpretations, recent British historical works emphasize that prior to the Korean War, the Foreign Office saw the United States as too sanguine about the Soviet bloc threat and felt it necessary to prod the Americans into action in Asia and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{17} Fears of Soviet bloc expansion became widespread among the other Western powers also, especially following the Czech coup in February 1948, the onset of the Berlin Blockade in June, and the beginning of the collapse of the Chinese Nationalist armies in the fall of that year.\textsuperscript{18}

The traditionalist view that European threat perceptions precipitated U.S. threat perceptions is supported by historian Geir Lundestad’s “Empire by Invitation” thesis.\textsuperscript{19} Lundestad argues that, far from thrusting itself upon


Europe in an anti-communist crusade, as the revisionists would have it, the United States was invited into a position of hegemonic leadership by European states who still faced the abysmal aftereffects of World War II and who believed they were facing an expansionist Soviet Union. Several of these countries, especially France and Italy, were also facing the challenge of large and vigorous local communist movements who were very likely to align with Moscow should they come to power. Although some critics play down the Western European fears of Soviet expansion and emphasize that their need for aid for internal reconstruction influenced their desire for a U.S. effort in Europe, these issues were strongly interconnected in the minds of many in the West.

These threat perceptions were not limited to actors at the core. Latin American officials, for example, informed the United States that the growing Soviet bloc threat in Asia in 1949–50 was causing them great concern, and complained to such a degree that the Truman administration began to worry that they would question U.S. leadership of the non-communist world. By January 1950 powers interested in Asia, such as Britain, France, Australia, and New Zealand, and some nations in Southeast Asia, such as the Philippines and Thailand, had reached the conclusion with surprising unanimity that Soviet and Chinese communist plans for expansion posed a region-wide threat. Concepts such as the coordination of international communist policies, Soviet bloc expansionism, and even the so-called domino theory were not U.S. inventions: all had their origins in the shift from multipolarity to bipolarity in the late 1940s. Fears of bandwagoning to the detriment of the West were widespread in the late 1940s, and not unreasonably so. U.S. power was widely and correctly perceived in the West, and increasingly in the Soviet Union itself, as the only credible obstacle to potential Soviet bloc expansion.

22. Memo, Corrigan to Austin (December 7, 1949), Harry S. Truman Library, Presidential Secretary File, Box 173; Memo, Corrigan to White House (December 22, 1949), ibid. See also the positive reactions by Latin American and other nations to the U.S. response to the Korean invasion in June 1950, in FRUS, 1950, Volume VII, pp. 190–193.
24. See the influential realist critique of bandwagoning fears in Stephen M. Walt, The Origins of Alliances (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1987). Leffler also questions fears of bandwagoning and disparages Soviet influence with Western European communist parties; Leffler, A Preponderance of Power, pp. 504–505. For the fears of falling dominoes widespread at this time, see Douglas J.
In sum, given the fact that most other non-communists widely viewed Soviet actions in the early Cold War as threatening to Western interests, analyses that focus solely on the psychology of U.S. decision-makers and their domestic political machinations cannot explain the causes of this phenomenon. By concentrating on internal causation, recent critiques of U.S. policies give the erroneous impression that the fear of communist bloc expansion was largely, if not exclusively, in the minds of U.S. decision-makers.

While an analysis that includes allied perceptions challenges the other explanations of the Cold War, it is necessary but insufficient to confirm a traditional interpretation. That these threat perceptions were widely shared does not necessarily prove that the threat was therefore objectively defined. But such analysis does properly shift the focus of attention to where the best evidence is to be found for testing the "unified Soviet bloc" thesis of traditionalism. What needs to be assessed further is whether these shared threat perceptions had a basis in reality, or were erroneous or greatly exaggerated as the critics charge.

Circumstantial Evidence: Control of the Revolution and the Role of Ideology

The U.S. standard for judging coordination of Soviet bloc policies assumed a considerable degree of Soviet control of the direction of international policies in intra-bloc and extra-bloc relations. This control over bloc policies, however, should not be viewed as day-to-day monolithic control of all actions taken by bloc members: despite some of their public rhetoric, U.S. leaders did not view the situation in this way. Revisionists, post-revisionists, and realists all argue, although for different reasons, that the assumption of Soviet leadership of a communist bloc was greatly exaggerated by traditionalist scholars. Indeed, if there is a single issue that most distinguishes these schools from the traditional view, it is the posited existence of a relatively unified bloc acting in concert. Thus the critics predict only low levels of effort by the Soviets to aid individual


25. I am indebted to Ed Rhodes for raising this point.
communist groups and a high degree of independence of action by all communists at the international and local levels, while traditionalists predict relatively generous support and a high degree of coordination of policies under Soviet strategic direction. What must be examined is the degree of control over the general direction of bloc policies, that is, the ability of the Soviet Union to shape the behavior of lesser members, especially revolutionary or foreign policies. There are few real puppets in international politics, but there are leaders and followers.

The various schools also disagree over the role of ideology in determining whether a coordination of bloc policies existed. Although ideologies take form and emerge from domestic politics, they also shape foreign policies over time by constraining the form and substance of information that is viewed as credible by decision-making elites. Marxist-Leninist ideology was used to identify opportunities for Soviet expansion by determining potential enemies and friends. In contrast to realist and other materialist assumptions, these determinations were often divorced from the relative power positions of the respective states or groups. To be sure, an analysis of the relative power of friends and enemies was important in ascertaining the existence of "revolutionary situations" and targets of opportunity for the Soviets. But ideology often determined who was a friend in the first place and whether they were worth aiding. Shared world views can therefore be as important as power factors in seeking allies, especially in supporting ideologically compatible non-ruling groups prior to their coming to power. This is particularly true with revolutionary "totalist" ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism that do not accept the idea of political pluralism. The desire to create compatible regimes in the world is virtually irresistible for such revolutionary states, and is viewed as necessary for both ideological and security reasons. Other Marxist-Leninists demonstrated similar ideological proclivities. In relation to Mao Zedong's decision-making, Allen Whiting has noted that "the consistency of the bias in his erroneous forecasts . . . make probable his wholehearted acceptance of Communist assumptions of world affairs." Traditionalism, in contrast to the other schools, would expect ideological considerations to help shape security goals and actions to a relatively high degree.

28. Chen, China's Road to the Korean War, p. 25.
NON-RULING COMMUNIST PARTIES

There has long been abundant circumstantial evidence that, among non-ruling communist parties, the ability of the Soviets to direct bloc policies was relatively high prior to World War II. Virtually all of the non-ruling parties accepted uncritically the Stalin-Hitler Pact of 1939, for example, and shifted back to a pro-Western policy after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, even if this was at the expense of local revolutionary goals. Most non-ruling parties underwent similar ideological contortions throughout the period to stay within the various international lines laid down by the Soviet Union. This pattern of temporarily abandoning or pursuing local revolutions to support international policy as defined by the Soviet Union was virtually universal among Marxist-Leninists. In China during the 1930s, for example, as Michael Sheng has argued persuasively, new evidence demonstrates that (in contrast to Western scholarship that strongly emphasizes Mao's early independence from policy direction from Moscow), Mao consistently turned to Stalin for advice and support. Indeed, Mao chose his military strategy in the 1930s to coordinate policies with Moscow and Comintern directives. In general, all members of the Comintern had to subordinate their policies to control by Soviet-dominated committees in this period.

This pattern of control continued among most non-ruling parties after World War II, and many times they had difficulty in keeping up with some of the abrupt shifts in the international line. The French and Italian communist par-


ties, for example, continued to proclaim the Soviet line from 1945 to 1947 that local parties in the West should temporarily attempt to cooperate with the local "nationalist bourgeoisie." When representatives of these parties attended the founding session of the Cominform in September 1947, however, they found themselves coming under intense criticism for espousing the line that, until then, the entire bloc had been directed to follow by the Soviets. The bloc’s international line had shifted to promoting disruption of delivery of Marshall Plan aid by transportation unions and open confrontation with local governments. The French and Italians stepped into line and returned home to lead demonstrations and strikes that led to a sharp decline in their popularity.

Both constraining and promoting revolutionary actions in non-ruling communist parties constituted forms of Soviet power over bloc international policies. For example, the Soviet Union used its power as bloc leader when it restrained the Italian and French communists from an insurrectionist policy in 1945; restrained the Japanese communists before 1950; and restrained the North Koreans from invading the south prior to June 1950; and when it promoted a revolutionary policy in 1947 for Italy and France, and in 1950 for Japan and Korea. Other non-ruling parties had similar experiences with Soviet control. The consistently strong correlation between changes in Soviet international lines and the timing of the corresponding changes in the behavior of virtually all of the world’s communist parties offers powerful circumstantial evidence that there was a significant degree of Soviet control over non-ruling parties in the period. To be sure, these groups had local concerns and nationalist aspirations, and U.S. policymakers were well aware of this. But they were also loyal to Soviet leadership and subject to Soviet direction in international affairs. If traditionalists at times exaggerated the degree of Soviet control, the other schools more often underestimated it. The clandestine nature of the inter-

national communist movement exacerbated this tendency towards suspicion of all anti-Western nationalist movements by many Americans and others.

RULING COMMUNIST PARTIES

In the aftermath of World War II, Stalin had to face the prospect of getting along with other ruling communist parties for the first time. The record of Soviet control of ruling parties is more mixed than for non-ruling ones, yet substantial enough to demonstrate that ruling parties often acted in concert under Soviet leadership to threaten non-communist nations. Much evidence challenging the independence thesis has long been available and typically has been debated only by Sovietologists while it was ignored by many other U.S. foreign policy specialists. Rather than a simple, monolithic dominant-subordinate relationship in the sense of control over the micromanagement of day-to-day policies, it is more accurate to think of these Soviet affiliations with bloc members in terms of patron-client relations with a strong dose of ideological solidarity and acceptance of Soviet leadership. These relationships were characterized by an important degree of control over the dispensation of scarce resources by the patron, including a significant degree of control over ideological legitimacy, which led to a limited yet important degree of control over the client. Both material and ideological factors were crucial to this Soviet leadership of the bloc.

Thus both ruling and non-ruling parties closely coordinated their policies with Soviet international lines in the early Cold War and did so to a degree that warranted the suspicion that the Soviets had control over those policies. The case of Titoism is instructive in this regard, and was used by Western decision-makers as an important measure of fealty to Moscow's direction of bloc policy. Tito was charged by the Soviets with the crime of nationalism because he would not allow Stalinist agents (a major means of ensuring that ideologically friendly factions rose to the top) to roam freely in Yugoslavia. All ruling and non-ruling parties stepped into line in condemning what should have been seen as relatively minor challenges to Soviet leadership if the assumption of independence were applicable. For example, the Chinese, despite their reputation for subsequent independence from Moscow, went out of their way to reassure Stalin of their loyalty to Soviet-led internationalism.

34. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, p. 33; Chen, China's Road to the Korean War, p. 68.
some critics have pointed to Tito as an example of the lack of Soviet control over bloc policies, he was the exact opposite: the exception that supports the rule.\textsuperscript{35} Within that context, Soviet dictates along international lines had to be followed or a party ran the risk of being labelled "Titoist." Criticism of Titoism, then, was a crude but accurate indicator of adherence to Stalin's international policy directions.

More reasonable standards must be found to describe these power relationships and measure the degree of international coordination of communist policies during the Cold War. On balance, the circumstantial evidence suggests that Western officials' perceptions of the Soviet bloc and traditional analyses of the Soviet threat were more correct than those of many subsequent critics. A relatively high degree of Soviet control over bloc members' policies, especially relations with other bloc nations and other international policies, but also often a Stalinist-inspired orthodoxy internally, was a consistent reality for most members in the early years of the Cold War.

\textit{Primary Evidence: Soviet Bloc Expansion in Asia}

If circumstantial evidence for the direction of international policies among ruling and non-ruling communist parties by the Soviets has long been abundantly available, why has the opposite conclusion been so prevalent? Often the standards of evidence demanded for demonstrating Soviet direction of foreign policies in the bloc are so high that they end up describing invariably discrete foreign policies, with little chance of disconfirmation. China is often utilized as an archetype in such a way, as an illustration of defiant resistance to Soviet control due to its highly developed sense of nationalism, its size and stature, and the independent nature of its leadership due to the leaders' having come to power without direct Soviet aid. This characterization is often used to claim that the solidarity of the Soviet bloc was an invention of American "paranoia" about monolithic communism. The Chinese communists also fostered such a perception through their own protestations of early independence following the Sino-Soviet splits of the 1960s.

New evidence now allows us to test more precisely the circumstantial inferences of Western leaders and traditional scholars in the early Cold War as to Soviet policy direction and bloc solidarity. The China case can therefore serve

\textsuperscript{35}. There is apparently evidence that Stalin issued orders to assassinate Tito, but that the plot was abandoned following the Russian dictator's death. See Steven Erlanger, "Soviet General Pens History and Finds Revelation," \textit{New York Times}, August 1, 1995, p. A3.
a heuristic purpose as a form of an unlikely "crucial case." That is, if close coordination of policies with the Soviet Union can be demonstrated in the Chinese case, where conditions would predict such behavior the least likely, it suggests that other cases will demonstrate an even stronger relationship as more new evidence becomes available. I first briefly counter some of the prevailing arguments for a high degree of Chinese independence of action. This is followed by an analysis of Soviet policy in Asia during the period. I then present traditional explanations for the Soviet-Chinese relationship, the Soviet-North Korean relationship, and the Sino-Vietnamese relationship in this period.

**STALIN'S ALLEGED CAUTION IN CHINA**

The Chinese case exposes a contradiction in the logic of the critics in assessing the degree of Moscow’s control over non-ruling parties. It is commonly posited that the Soviets, and especially Stalin in the early period, would back only revolutionary movements that were amenable to Soviet control. This is a major means of promoting the idea of the cautious and non-ideological Stalin. Yet, as we shall see, the Soviets supported the Chinese communists in a significant way. The critics cannot have it both ways. If Stalin only backed those parties that were amenable to Soviet control, then the Chinese were not as independent as typically portrayed. On the other hand, if Stalin strongly backed the independent Chinese, then he backed parties that he could not control to a high degree. The new evidence calls into question the dominant views in the literature of both Stalin’s revolutionary caution and the Chinese communists’ independence from Soviet influence.

An anecdote that is widely utilized to demonstrate both Stalin’s caution and his lack of influence is based on his remarks to the Yugoslavs about China in 1948. Stalin acknowledged that he had advised the Chinese at the end of World War II to abandon hopes for a revolution any time soon, and that the Chinese had gone their own way and pursued a communist revolution in defiance of his wishes. Note, first, that Stalin’s comment to the Chinese in 1945 displays

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an expectation of a certain degree of control over their behavior and says something of his views of the subordination of communist parties, although he was wrong in the short term in this instance. Second, Stalin’s policies were never as anti-revolutionary as they are made out to be by this statement. It is true that he advised caution to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1945, but he simultaneously aided the Chinese communists in 1945, had begun to change his mind over their chances for success as early as January 1946, and by late 1947 had begun to aid the CCP in a major way. Third, the CCP apparently initially took Stalin’s direction on dealing with the Nationalist government. From late 1945 until the early months of the Marshall Mission in 1946, despite incidents instigated by both sides, the CCP was at least as cooperative as the Nationalists with the U.S. plans for a coalition government. This was in congruence with what Stalin advised, at least until March 1946 when CCP spies ascertained that the Nationalists were going on the offensive. The CCP continued negotiations with the Nationalists until early 1947. Fourth, Stalin admitted to the Yugoslavs that the Chinese had been right in casting aside his advice and pursuing their revolutionary goals. Surely this calls into question his alleged complete distrust of the CCP, his alleged pervasive fear of all communists not completely subservient to his control, and his alleged anti-revolutionary actions, at least in China.

Thus the analytical assumption of a consistently cautious Stalin and a consistently independent CCP must be reappraised. The evidence in the new interpretations shows that following his admission of error on China to the Yugoslavs in early 1948, Stalin gave steady and growing clandestine support to the Chinese revolution. He also frequently apologized to the CCP leadership for having misjudged the situation and providing them with poor advice. The public aloofness of the Soviets toward the CCP, so much commented upon by critics as evidence of Stalin’s hostility toward the communist revolution in China, was most likely meant to avoid underscoring the Soviet role in a bloc victory of giant magnitude before it had become a fait accompli and thus provoking a unified Western response against the Soviet Union.

These newly disclosed behind-the-scenes machinations put another anecdote used by the Cold War critics in a new light: the Soviet ambassador continued to remain with the Nationalist Government in 1949 as it was forced to move

its capital from Nanjing (Nanking) to Guangzhou (Canton) when other nations
had their ambassadors stay behind to do business with the new communist
government. This Soviet action has often been held up by both Western schol-
ars and the Chinese communists as an illustration of Stalin’s hostility towards
the CCP victory. But given what is now known about the simultaneous
clandestine aid and support given to the CCP, the gesture’s meaning does not
appear to be so obvious. By April 1949, Stalin clearly did not see a Nationalist
victory as possible. Given his actions to hide Soviet acts of patronage else-
where, in all probability Stalin ordered his ambassador to remain very publicly
and idiosyncratically with the Nationalists in order to give the impression to
the West that he was not interested in or directly involved with the CCP victory:
to cover his tracks, so to speak. If so, he apparently succeeded in doing so for
many Western observers of Soviet foreign policy.

THE SOVIET VIEW: ASIA AS A REVOLUTIONARY WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY
An interpretation of Soviet threat perceptions at the international level also
adds new insights to understanding of Soviet actions. As traditionalism and
perhaps realism predict, it was primarily fear of U.S. intervention in China,
rather than suspicion of the Chinese communists or internal societal exhaustion
in the Soviet Union, that caused the early Soviet coolness to the Chinese Civil
War. Stalin told the Yugoslavs: “I was so sure that the Americans would do
everything to put down an uprising [in China].” Once he became convinced
that the United States would not intervene, Stalin began aiding the CCP in a
relatively big way, especially given that the Soviet Union had paid such a heavy
price in World War II. As traditionalism predicts far more clearly than realism,
however, the new evidence shows that in return for this Soviet support, and
in deference to the established Soviet leadership of international communism,
by late 1947 Mao had completely accepted Soviet bloc leadership in the Cold
War. This was not simply a power-based security alliance; it also included a
strong dose of ideological solidarity.

Scribner’s, 1992), p. 40; Bruce D. Porter, The USSR in Third World Conflicts: Soviet Arms and
over this incident can be seen in Dr. Li Zhisui, The Private Life of Chairman Mao: The Memoirs of
42. Quoted in Holloway, Stalin and the Bomb, p. 274. See also, Chang, Friends and Enemies, pp. 29,
64; Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, pp. 10–14, 74, 99–100, 105, 106–107.
43. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, pp. 29, 30, 39, 60, 61, 76. For primary evidence,
see the testimony of Stalin’s main representative to the Chinese communists in those years, in “I.V.
Kovalev, Stalin’s Representative, answers questions of Sinologist S.N. Goncharov. Translated by
Soviet strategic probes in Asia commenced following the Cominform’s call in late 1947 for revolutionary uprisings. At the famous Calcutta Conference of communist and revolutionary parties of the East in early 1948, the Soviets gave a green light to communist parties in Asia who were inclined to revolt. In the ensuing months of 1948, communist insurgencies and revolts of varying intensity flared in Malaya, Burma, Thailand, the federated states of Indochina, Indonesia, and the Philippines. The Indian Communist Party also attempted to take over a province in this period.44

Although hard evidence for a direct and pervasive bloc role in these developments in Southeast Asia is difficult to come by, it strains credulity to believe that they were simply coincidental. The revolutionary situation in Southeast Asia was the result of a complicated combination of the destruction of indigenous patterns of authority by the Japanese during their occupations and the local power vacuums created by their defeat. This caused the demoralization of indigenous non-communist elites, some of whom had collaborated with the Japanese. The lack of a coherent Western response in the region fed the perception that there were “contradictions” among the “imperialists,” and that the West was in retreat. There was also widespread anger in the region directed at the continuation of colonialism in some countries. Moreover, the United States was the only state with the economic and political power to respond effectively, but it seemed to lack a sense of purpose; the Chinese communist victory offered inspiration to local non-ruling parties. Within this chaotic context, these converged to create a revolutionary opportunity of the first magnitude for the Soviet bloc and led to a region-wide, ideologically driven threat to non-communist nations and political groups.

At the international level, Stalin based his willingness to support communist revolts on two criteria: his comprehension of the probable Western responses, especially those that might threaten the Soviet Union; and his estimation of the client revolutionary group’s chances for success. These elements were often interrelated in his planning. As he had told the Yugoslavs in early 1948, the

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commitment of the United States ("the most powerful state in the world") and Great Britain to Greece meant that the bloc had to retreat tactically and end support for the Greek communist insurgency because it had no chance to succeed in the foreseeable future.\(^4\) With tactical caution in the face of Western resolve, he probed for weaknesses and contradictions among his adversaries, which his comprehension of a revolutionary situation told him would appear at some point. Western containment policies in Europe and in the Near and Middle East checked such probes by 1948.\(^5\) It was in Asia beginning in that year that the impending victory of the Chinese communists and the anti-colonialist fervor sweeping the region in the aftermath of the defeat of Japan appeared to offer a revolutionary window of opportunity. As David Holloway aptly puts it, by 1949 "the Cold War in Europe had become a war of position; in Asia, where the situation was much more fluid and dynamic, it was a war of maneuver."\(^6\) This situation was reinforced by the evident confusion among the Western allies over how to respond to the looming CCP victory. Europe and the Middle East having been closed because of a unified Western response, the Soviets turned their attention to Asia as they had in 1923, and as had the czars before them.\(^7\)

The impression of emerging contradictions among the capitalist powers was probably fortified by information provided by the infamous "Cambridge Cominform," British communist spies holding extremely sensitive positions dealing with Asia policy within the British government. These men stole and communicated to Moscow virtually all information concerning regional planning that was passing between the United States and the United Kingdom, then somewhat at odds with one another over how to respond to the turmoil in Asia. In particular, the spies were in a position to tell Moscow that the United States would not respond militarily to a Chinese communist victory, would not fight for Taiwan, had no comprehensive regional plan, and was generally unlikely to intervene in an area of tertiary interest. The British favored a much

47. Holloway, _Stalin and the Bomb_, p. 274.
more vigorous policy in the region. If these suppositions are true, they add an
important element to our understanding of Stalin’s decision to unleash Kim II
Sung in June 1950. Stalin saw the relatively tepid Western response in Asia in
ideological and system-wide terms. By mid-1949 he had come to believe that
“war is not advantageous to the imperialists. Their crisis [of capitalism] has
begun, they are not ready to fight.”49 This analysis was passed on to other
communist parties in Asia and in some cases influenced their decisions to
revolt against their governments.50

SOVIET INTERVENTION IN CHINA, 1945–50

Much of the new evidence emanating from the East confirms that the Soviet
Union directed bloc parties more than had been previously known. As impor-
tant as power considerations were in affecting Stalin’s Asia policies, ideological
factors were just as crucial in shaping communist actions in the region. Stalin’s
ideological infallibility was still taken seriously by Marxist-Leninists in the
aftermath of World War II, despite his monumental errors, and they continued
to turn to Moscow for guidance and leadership. There may have been a good
deal of cognitive dissonance in the bloc in this period, but there was little
political dissonance.

Although the Soviets feared a U.S. intervention in China and thought the
CCP incapable of defeating the Nationalists prior to 1947, they continued to
aid the Chinese communists surreptitiously after World War II. From 1945 to
1949 the Soviets strategically directed and physically facilitated the move of
some 400,000 Chinese communist troops and 20,000 cadres into the key region
of Manchuria in late 1945 and early 1946 in violation of agreements they had
made with the United States and the Nationalist Government; supplied the
CCP with bloc-manufactured and captured Japanese military equipment in
sufficient amounts to equip 600,000 men; provided tanks and heavy artillery

49. Quoted in Holloway, Stalin and the Bomb, p. 264. See also Peter Hennessy and Kathleen
Townsend, “The Documentary Spoor of Burgess and Maclean,” Intelligence and National Security,
Vol. 2, No. 2 (1987), pp. 291–301; Christopher Andrew and Oleg Gordievsky, KGB: The Inside Story
Untold Story of Maclean, Philby, and Burgess in America (Lanham, Md.: Madison, 1991), especially
pp. 191, 201–206, 268, 286, 404 fn. 16.

50. A communist party leader in the Philippines, for example, said in July 1950 that the party’s
decision to claim that a “revolutionary situation” existed in that country was based on a perception
that the United States was not able to help the Filipino government financially. They had reached
this conclusion, he stated, “based largely on an analysis of the U.S. economy . . . which actually
relied a lot on one by a top Soviet economist.” Benedict J. Kerkvliet, The Huk Rebellion: A Study of
that proved critical in the communists’ battles with the Nationalists; helped the Chinese communists build munitions factories in Soviet-controlled areas of Manchuria that were crucial to the defeat of the Nationalists; and provided economic and political guidance, which was, especially after 1947, largely followed by Mao and the CCP leadership. This aid and support, particularly in the early stages of the revolution, “radically affected the outcome of the Civil War.”

This effort can no longer be credibly portrayed as half-hearted Soviet support of the CCP. Mao later repeatedly claimed that the Soviets never gave the Chinese communists a single gun or bullet during the Civil War, and many Western scholars portrayed the Soviet aid effort as modest and inconsequential. However, the new documentary record demonstrates a major Soviet effort to ensure that a communist revolution succeeded in China, especially following the formation of the Cominform in late 1947. Moreover, that record shows that the Chinese communists recognized the value of the aid to their success, despite their later denials.

The Soviets also helped coordinate aid from other bloc members to support the Chinese communist revolution. The CCP received significant backing from the North Korean regime of Kim Il Sung. After the Chinese Civil War broke out in mid-1946, the CCP used North Korea as a rear base area in which wounded soldiers could be treated, families could be sheltered from the Nationalist police, and bloc supplies could reach the Chinese. In addition, North Korea itself provided the CCP with large amounts of supplies taken from the Japanese or provided by the Soviets. From 1946 to 1948, the Koreans supplied more than 500,000 tons of strategic materials to the Chinese. An estimated 100,000–150,000 Korean-nationality troops remained in the Chinese communist army to fight in the Civil War. The bloc aid emanating from North Korea and

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51. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 10–12, 14, quotation from p. 8. See also Chen, *China’s Road to the Korean War*, p. 68.
52. For arguments that there was little aid given to the Chinese, see MacFarlane, “Successes and Failures in Soviet Policy,” pp. 24–25; Melvyn Leffler, *The Specter of Communism: The United States and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917–1953* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994), pp. 87, 98. Mao often complained to his personal physician that Stalin had given the CCP absolutely nothing. Li, *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, p. 117. I too have argued that Soviet intervention in the Chinese Civil War was minimal and unimportant, relying on the prevailing secondary treatments in the literature and U.S. intelligence reports on this issue from the 1940s. However, both appear to have been significantly off the mark, and so was I. See Macdonald, *Adventures in Chaos*, pp. 81, 86, 90, 117.
the Soviet Union dramatically improved the Chinese communists’ strategic position in the northeast.54

As the prospect of a CCP victory became more likely in mid-1948, Stalin was not wary, as often portrayed, but eager. His comprehension of the situation was not based on power analysis alone, but also contained an important ideological element. He told aides that the Soviet Union wanted a communist victory in China for both ideological and security reasons because the Marxist-Leninist concept of a revolutionary situation in the region led him to expect it to be followed by other revolutions in Asia. The Soviet Union therefore had to act:

“We will of course give the new China all possible assistance. If socialism is victorious in China and our countries follow a single path, then the victory of socialism in the world will virtually be guaranteed. Nothing will threaten us. Therefore, we cannot withhold any effort or means in our support of the Chinese Communists.” Stalin continued to fear that the United States might intervene, and he believed that any aid had to be sent clandestinely to avoid provoking the capitalist powers. The surprising lack of a U.S. military response to the communist victory in China gradually allayed those fears. In addition, the Soviet detonation of an atomic device in August 1949 added to the perception of a precipitous shift in the global balance of power in favor of the communist “camp.”55

In May 1948 the CCP requested and received Soviet help in running the economy in “liberated” areas of China, where the Chinese lacked expertise and personnel. In complete secrecy, Stalin personally dispatched 300 economic advisers to Manchuria. Such support greatly enhanced the consolidation of the CCP’s military victory in the northeast, one of the most industrialized areas of


55. Stalin quoted by one of those aides, Kovalev, “Stalin’s Dialogue with Mao Zedong,” p. 58. See also Zubok and Pleshakov, “The Soviet Union,” p. 62; Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, pp. 30, 31, 39, 60, 61. Mao also believed that the U.S. reluctance to intervene in China was crucial to the CCP victory. Chen, China’s Road to the Korean War, pp. 85, 89, 101–102. For the Soviet atomic detonation and its effects on bloc perceptions, see Holloway, Stalin and the Bomb, pp. 264–272.
China, ensuring the CCP a large base area and denying the Nationalists one of the more economically developed regions of the country at a time when they were going bankrupt.\textsuperscript{56}

By January 1949, the Soviets were directly advising the CCP in its dealings with the Nationalists. The Chinese communists closely followed Stalin's advice by responding to a Nationalist offer for peace negotiations with terms that they knew would be unacceptable.\textsuperscript{57} These tactics were quite similar to those used by the Soviets in their "peace offensive" in Europe and elsewhere in 1949. The Soviet dictator then sent Anastas Mikoyan on a secret mission to China to advise the CCP on final operations in the Civil War and to aid in the beginning of reconstruction. The story that Mikoyan advised the Chinese to halt their military advance at the Yangzi (Yangtse) River and be satisfied with controlling the northern half of the country, often used to demonstrate that Stalin feared the communist victory in China,\textsuperscript{58} is evidently not true. In fact, former Soviet diplomats affirm that Stalin advised the Chinese on how best to advance militarily south of the Yangzi. In the meetings with Mikoyan, ideological solidarity was emphasized by the Chinese. Mao and his colleagues assured the Soviets that the New China would be a Marxist-Leninist state, despite the presence of some non-communists in its ruling coalition. Later in that year, to demonstrate good faith and reduce Mao's suspicions, Stalin had the KGB inform Mao of pro-Soviet Chinese communist agents within the CCP.\textsuperscript{59}

The clandestine Soviet advising effort gradually expanded as the CCP continued to do well on the battlefield. In the spring of 1949, Soviet advisers were secretly aiding in the plans for the creation of the People's Republic of China, even as Stalin's ambassador to China ostentatiously traveled with the Nation-

\textsuperscript{56} Kovalev, "Stalin's Dialogue with Mao Zedong," pp. 46–47; Chen, \textit{China's Road to the Korean War}, p. 68. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue incorrectly state that U.S. support for the Nationalists was "uninterrupted" in the 1940s and drove Mao away from the West. \textit{Uncertain Partners}, p. 29. In fact, there was a U.S.-led arms embargo of the Nationalists from August 1946 to May 1947 and uneven support after that. The CCP was well aware of these developments. Macdonald, \textit{Adventures in Chaos}, pp. 96–98.


\textsuperscript{58} Chang, \textit{Friends and Enemies}, pp. 28–29. Mao also often repeated this story; see Li, \textit{The Private Life of Chairman Mao}, p. 117.

\textsuperscript{59} On Mikoyan's visit, see the testimony of Stalin's main agent in China, in Kovalev, "Stalin's Dialogue with Mao Zedong," pp. 48–50, 73 fn. 4. See also Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, \textit{Uncertain Partners}, pp. 42–43; Chen, \textit{China's Road to the Korean War}, pp. 69–70. Many of these people were then imprisoned or executed by Mao for spying. Various former KGB officials involved in the spy incident made anguished comments in the Public Broadcasting System documentary, "Messengers from Moscow: Part II, The East is Red," broadcast on January 20, 1995, on WCNY-TV. See also Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, \textit{Uncertain Partners}, p. 74.
alist Government to Guangzhou. By mid-1949, the Soviets were comprehensively advising the Chinese in the fighting with the Nationalists. By March 1950, following a trip by Mao to Moscow to sign a Sino-Soviet mutual defense treaty, the Soviet Union sent an air division to China, and Soviet pilots were shooting down Nationalist planes in order to help consolidate the CCP victory, an intervention in the Chinese Civil War that exceeded any by the United States or any other Western nation.60

Despite some apparently rough moments in the patron-client bargaining, the CCP repaid the Soviets for this aid by deferring to their leadership in most major areas of interaction between the two parties. During a trip to Moscow in July 1949 by Liu Shaoqi (Liu Shao-chi), the second in command in the CCP, this bloc relationship was further cemented. Prior to Liu’s trip, and in light of some lingering suspicions by Stalin of Chinese loyalty in the dispute with Tito, the CCP accepted Stalin’s view of the Tito affair and the Cold War. They again publicly condemned the Yugoslavs and declared allegiance to the communist “camp” in Mao’s “leaning to one side” speech of June 1949. At the same time, in a statement apparently aimed at Tito, Nehru, Sukarno, and other advocates of Third World neutralism, Mao also stated publicly that “neutrality is a hoax. No third path exists.”61 Contrary to some revisionist arguments, this was in accord with the international line that had been put forth by the Soviets.62

The Chinese adoption of the Soviet international line on Tito and on the inevitability of the Cold War was not simply a coincidence or a reflection of Chinese anger at the West, but represented a shared ideological commitment. While in Moscow, Liu reiterated this theme and privately assured Stalin that the CCP would abide by all Soviet resolutions in bilateral and bloc policies.63 Mao made the same entreaties to the primary Soviet representative to China, Ivan Kovalev, and “repeatedly emphasized” that he “would fully defer” to Stalin’s judgment on international issues. The Chinese communists also rewarded Stalin’s largesse with complete agreement on Soviet dominance in

60. Kovalev, “Stalin’s Dialogue with Mao Zedong,” p. 51; Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, p. 320 fn. 123; Ulam, Expansion and Coexistence, p. 495; Chen, China’s Road to the Korean War, p. 84.
62. For the revisionist argument that Mao’s “leaning to one side” statement actually meant a middle position between the superpowers in the Cold War, see the influential Robert R. Simmons, The Strained Alliance: Peking, Pyongyang, Moscow and the Politics of the Korean Civil War (New York: Free Press, 1975), p. 61. For recent correctives, see Zhai, The Dragon, the Lion, and the Eagle, pp. 19–24; Chen, China’s Road to the Korean War, pp. 71–78.
63. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, pp. 44–47, 55, 63–65, 73, 80–82.
Mongolia and relatively generous economic arrangements in Manchuria that, taken together, infuriated the non-communist nationalists in their coalition. Caught up in the internationalist moment, one pro-Soviet Chinese communist factional leader actually suggested that Manchuria be incorporated into the Soviet Union.  

During Liu’s visit, Stalin officially acknowledged to the Chinese that the center of the world revolution had shifted from Europe to Asia, and gave his personal blessing for promoting revolutionary insurgencies in the region. Specifically, he advised the Chinese to support the non-ruling communist parties in India, Burma, Indonesia, and the Philippines in overthrowing their governments, although it is not yet clear what form that support was supposed to have taken. In a kind of Stalinist domino theory, he stated that if these efforts were successful, Japan very well might be next. Stalin told Liu, “You must fulfill your [internationalist] duty with regard to the revolution in the countries of East Asia.” Kovalev reports that Liu promised that the CCP would follow the decisions of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Stalin said this would not be necessary, but that it was important to form “an alliance of the communist parties of East Asia.” The Soviet leader sent 600 more advisers to aid in these tasks, and the pace of Soviet military aid to the Chinese quickened to support this bloc effort.  

Throughout late 1949 and early 1950, by exhorting the Chinese to spread the revolution in Southeast Asia, preparing Kim II Sung for the invasion of South Korea, and proposing the creation of a union of Asian communist parties under the leadership of China, Stalin became more expansionist in his strategic planning for the bloc. As traditionalists assumed, Stalin and Mao became emboldened when they concluded from the lack of a U.S. response in China that the United States was unwilling or unable to act. Previously Stalin had argued, as he had on revolution in China in 1945 or Greece in 1948, that Kim had little chance for success; the Americans would “never agree to be thrown out” of the Korean peninsula because they would lose “their reputation as a great power.” With the U.S. failure in China, however, this perception of U.S. resolve underwent drastic change. Mao declared the United States’ possession

64. The quotations are from the Chinese minutes of a meeting between Mao and Kovalev in Moscow, probably in early 1950. Mao specifically asked Kovalev to pass the comments on to Stalin. See Kovalev, “Stalin’s Dialogue with Mao Zedong,” pp. 71–72, quotations from p. 72.
66. Stalin is quoted by a former Soviet diplomat in Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, p. 138.
of atomic weapons a "paper tiger." Thus the two communist leaders generalized from the particular U.S. failure in China and assumed that the United States would not react in the rest of the region. The China-Korea case may tell us much about the effects of failures on great power reputations that flies in the face of some recent realist analyses of the role of resolve in deterrence policies. The flat declarations of analysts such as Ted Hopf that there exists "no evidence" that decision-makers "infer an opponent's general irresoluteness and weakness from encounters in the periphery" are incorrect in the Asian case in the early Cold War.67

In November 1949, Liu Shaoqi publicly announced the militant bloc policy for Asia at a conference of international leftist organizations in Beijing, an event much noticed in the West. Both the Chinese and Vietnamese delegations called on the parties of Southeast Asia to follow the Chinese revolutionary example. Although this Asian alliance was never formed because of the outbreak of war in Korea, the Sino-Soviet revolutionary link in the region was forged. In January and February 1950, Mao and Stalin signed a treaty of cooperation that included extensive mutual defense obligations: a $300 million Soviet loan to the Chinese government; provision of 60,000 additional Soviet technical aides to China over the next three years; and transfer of whole industries, which by 1955 comprised nearly 90 percent of the Chinese industrial base. The Soviets allowed the Chinese to use the loans to purchase military equipment to upgrade their navy and air force in anticipation of the invasion of Taiwan. In secret side agreements only recently made public, the Soviets got far more concessions than the Chinese would have liked, undoubtedly sowing some of the seeds of the resentments that surfaced in the Sino-Soviet splits of the 1960s. Yet some of the new evidence from China, including the memoirs of Mao's interpreter, strongly suggests that the Chinese leader was generally satisfied with the terms of the Sino-Soviet alliance and aid agreements.68

As traditionalism predicts, Mao made the agreements for a mixture of power and ideological reasons. Even after de-Stalinization, Mao defended his acquiescence to Stalin's bloc leadership in 1950 even if it may have run against Chinese material interests in the short run. During a March 1958 conference in China, Mao said:

67. Ted Hopf, "Soviet Inferences from Their Victories in the Periphery: Visions of Resistance or Cumulating Gains?" in Jervis and Snyder, Dominoes and Bandwagons, p. 147.
68. The views of Mao's interpreter are cited in Chen, China's Road to the Korean War, pp. 79, 84; see also Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, pp. 99-100, 114, 121-122, 129; Chen, Ideology in United States Foreign Policy, p. 25, 58.
In 1950 I argued with Stalin in Moscow for two months. . . . We adopted two attitudes: one was to argue when the [Soviets] made proposals we did not agree with, and the other was to accept their proposal if they absolutely insisted. This was out of consideration for the interests of socialism.\footnote{Stuart Schram, ed., Chairman Mao Talks to the People: Talks and Letters: 1956–1971 (New York: Pantheon, 1974), p. 101. See also Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, Uncertain Partners, pp. 122, 129.}

This attitude could be found in any ideologically driven patron-client relationship, and represented a relatively high degree of Soviet control over CCP policies.

In the Philippines in November 1949, the communists declared a “revolutionary situation” and publicly made common cause with the communist victory in China.\footnote{Macdonald, Adventures in Chaos, p. 137.} Beginning in December 1949, communist-led labor unions in France, where the communist party was solidly Stalinist, staged a number of demonstrations and strikes to block the shipment of troops and supplies to Indochina.\footnote{George McT. Kahin, Intervention: How America Became Involved in Vietnam (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor/Doubleday, 1987), p. 23.} In January 1950, the Cominform directed the Japanese Communist Party to adopt a more militant policy line and to disrupt the U.S. occupation, perhaps to distract the United States from the coming invasion of South Korea.\footnote{Holloway, Stalin and the Bomb, p. 276; Colbert, The Left Wing in Japanese Politics, pp. 286–301.} In March 1950, Molotov publicly declared the Chinese Revolution to be the most important postwar event, and in the following month Stalin secretly gave approval for the North Korean invasion. With revolutionary fervor running high, and international and local resistance apparently low, the Soviet bloc appeared to be on the march in Asia. It would be stopped several months later in Korea.\footnote{The UN military action in Korea was followed by a number of military and economic policies initiated by the United States in Southeast Asia that, except in Indochina, helped immensely in stabilizing the region and removing the kinds of revolutionary opportunities that appeared to present themselves to the Soviet bloc in 1948 and 1949. See Gary R. Hess, The United States’ Emergence as a Southeast Asian Power, 1940–1950 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), chap. 11.}

**Bloc Expansion: Spreading the Revolution in Korea and Vietnam**

Many revisionist, post-revisionist, and realist critics of U.S. policies have questioned whether there was a direct Soviet role in initiating the invasion of South Korea by Kim Il Sung’s regime in 1950 and in China’s adoption of a role as Soviet surrogate among Asian communist parties. Traditionalists have argued
that the Soviets played a direct role in the Korean War, and that they designated the Chinese as the bloc's representative in supporting revolution in Southeast Asia. The new evidence on the Soviet role in Korea and the Chinese role in Vietnam strongly supports a traditionalist interpretation of bloc expansion.

Revisionist historians such as Robert Simmons and Bruce Cumings have argued for a high degree of independence of action for the northern regime, and Samuel Wells has made the realist argument that the decision for war was primarily Chinese and Korean, thereby challenging the traditional view of Soviet bloc leadership. These views are no longer credible. As Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai conclude in their path-breaking work based on a great deal of new evidence, the North Korean invasion was "preplanned, blessed, and directly assisted by Stalin and his generals, and reluctantly backed by Mao at Stalin's insistence."

Stalin personally informed Kim Il Sung, formerly both a member of the CCP and an officer in the Soviet army, and Ho Chi Minh, a former member of the CCP and a Comintern agent for nearly thirty years, of the change to a militant policy and the new Chinese role as bloc leader in the region in early 1950. The Chinese combat role in Korea is well known. It has also long been known that the Soviets and Chinese supplied the North Koreans in their attempt to take over the South. The question that deserves new attention is the role of the Soviets in initiating and participating in the hostilities.

The new evidence demonstrates conclusively that North Korea was a satellite of the Soviet Union. Soviet control over Kim's revolutionary policy was such that it could prevent him from attacking the South or allow him to do so at will: the North Koreans had wanted to attack as early as the spring of 1949 but had to wait until the Soviets gave their permission and material support in the spring of 1950. Once the decision was made, the Chinese and Soviet supply effort to the North Koreans was massive. The detailed plans for the invasion were drawn up by the Soviets and then communicated to the Koreans. The North Koreans never took any major actions without first consulting with the Soviets. The Soviets were not only not surprised by the timing of the attack, as often claimed, but helped choose its date and timing. Soviet advisers in

75. Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, _Uncertain Partners_, p. 213. Hao and Zhai emphasize Mao's reluctance, based on interviews in China, in "China's Decision to Enter the Korean War." Mao was apparently reluctant because he wanted to invade Taiwan first, and his relations with Kim Il Sung were strained.
Korea played crucial roles in executing the invasion in its early stages. By any reasonable measurement, this is an unusually high degree of control over the freedom of action of another state. Most of the major claims of the revisionists, post-revisionists, and realists on Soviet-Korean relations are thus largely incorrect, and most of those of the traditionalists essentially sound.76

Moreover, the Soviet actions in support of the Koreans included a direct role in the fighting that was far greater than previously known in the West: a total of 70,000 Soviet pilots, gunners, and technicians served in Korea, and claimed to have shot down a total of 569 allied aircraft. Elaborate precautions were typically taken to cover the Soviet military role, such as Soviet soldiers dressing in Chinese uniforms and attempting to speak only in the Korean language during air operations. The Soviets played a similar clandestine role in the Vietnam War in the mid-1960s.77 It can no longer be stated categorically that the superpowers never directly fought one another in the Cold War. Yet some revisionist authors play down the Soviet actions in Korea in the face of extensive evidence to the contrary, calling them defensive, "modest," insignificant, or not indicative of Soviet expansionist designs because they were "unofficial."78

In their new role as bloc leader in the region, the Chinese began a large-scale effort in Indochina to support the Viet Minh under the leadership of Ho Chi


Minh, as well as to help the Vietnamese reorganize the Cambodian and Laotian communists who had been members of the Indochinese Communist Party in the 1930s. This was done for a mixture of security and ideological purposes. Cold War critics portrayed these actions as minimal and ineffective, but the new evidence emerging from China challenges this notion. Direct Chinese aid to the Vietnamese was critical to their military victory over the French, as was Soviet aid to the Chinese in their civil war, just as traditionalist scholarship suggested.79

As the Chinese approached the border with Vietnam in 1949, the prospects for a communist victory in Indochina did not appear bright. Although Cold War critics often assume the inevitability of an indigenous Viet Minh victory, Ho himself acknowledged that his strategic situation was stagnant prior to 1950. This immediately began to change with the arrival of the Chinese communists.80 Liu Shaoqi had already publicly declared in his militant speech of November 1949 that China would materially support the Indochinese communists, and it was at Chinese initiative that Ho traveled to Moscow in early 1950 to meet with Stalin during Mao's visit there to negotiate the Sino-Soviet mutual defense treaty. Stalin informed Ho that aid for the Vietnamese revolution was a Chinese responsibility, in accordance with the new Chinese role as bloc leader in the region.81

The aid began to flow immediately. From 1950 to 1954, the Chinese clandestinely assisted the Viet Minh in a major effort to ensure the success of the Vietnamese communists. As early as March 1950, more than 50,000 small arms reportedly had been given to the Vietnamese communists by the Chinese, a significant arms cache for what were still guerrilla fighters.82 On June 27, 1950,

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81. The Viet Minh publicly announced as early as April 1949 that Chinese troops had reached the Sino-Vietnamese border and that “important support” had begun as the CCP carried out “great activity” in the area. See the report in FRUS, 1949, Vol. VII, Pt. I, pp. 17–18. Contacts between the Soviets and Vietnamese had begun in earnest in mid-1948 in Bangkok. With the CCP victory, those bloc consultations were taken over by the Chinese after Stalin told Ho in January 1950 that aid for the Vietnamese communists was Mao’s responsibility. See Hoang Van Hoan, *A Drop in the Ocean* (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1988), pp. 251–252, 276, 281. (Hoan was a former member of the Vietnamese politburo and ambassador to China who defected to China after the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1979.) See also Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, *Uncertain Partners*, pp. 107–108.
82. William J. Duiker, *U.S. Containment Policy and the Conflict in Indochina* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1994), p. 89. For the entire Chinese effort from 1950 to 1978, see Hoan, *A Drop in
two days after the North Korean attack on South Korea and when that military action was going very well, Mao told a Chinese Military Assistance Group (CMAG) prior to their departure for Vietnam: "Since our revolution has achieved victory, we have an obligation to help others. This is called internationalism." Mao himself sometimes directed tactical maneuvers and chose target areas for the Vietnamese; he did so during the battle of Dien Bien Phu.

The Chinese also directed and supplied Viet Minh military operations to an extent that is only now becoming clear. These actions were always cleared through Ho and his politburo, but he often overruled his own military commanders to follow Chinese advice. From 1950 to 1954, the CMAG drew up most of the strategic and tactical plans for the three major campaigns against the French; it sent Chinese military advisers to command Vietnamese troops in the field; the Chinese brought large numbers of Vietnamese cadres and soldiers to China to train; China acted as a safe base area for the Viet Minh in the crucial Border Campaign meant to secure a border with China for future supplies; and it was at Chinese urging that Laos became a major target for Vietnamese military operations.

Direct material aid was also extensive. In the Border Campaign of 1950, the Chinese provided the Vietnamese with more than 14,000 additional small weapons; 1,700 machine guns; 150 artillery pieces of various sizes; 2,800 tons of grain; and large amounts of ammunition, medicine, uniforms, and communications equipment. Like Soviet soldiers in Korea, Chinese officers who planned and directed the campaign dressed in Vietnamese uniforms to hide bloc involvement from the outside world.

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the Ocean, pp. 284–293. The Vietnamese have reluctantly admitted that China was the "main supplier" of arms in this period. The Socialist Republic of Vietnam, The Truth About Vietnam-China Relations Over the Last Thirty Years (Hanoi: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1979), pp. 5, 18.


In the battle of Dien Bien Phu in 1954, which convinced the French and much of the world that the Vietnamese communists' military victory was inevitable, the Chinese claim that all major military operations, as well as strategy and tactics, were devised and planned by the CMAG. All arms, ammunition, communications equipment, and other supplies apparently came from the Chinese. There have been some reports in Chinese army publications that Chinese soldiers served in the field during the battle. Emergency engineering battalions were sent to supervise the construction of the tunnel system used so effectively against the French. For that battle alone, the Chinese supplied 200 trucks; 10,000 barrels of oil; over 100 artillery pieces; 3,000 medium-sized guns; 2,400,000 rounds of small arms ammunition; and 1,700 tons of grain. When French resistance proved much stronger than predicted, the Chinese assured the Vietnamese that they could have whatever necessary to achieve victory. In the final assault, the Chinese provided all of the rocket launchers that were crucial to the defeat of the French.\(^7\)

Time and again throughout the First Indochinese War, the Vietnamese accepted Chinese advice and direction on planning, strategy, and tactics. In terms of material aid, from 1950–54 the Chinese armed and trained a total of 116,000 Viet Minh fighters: five infantry divisions, one engineering and artillery division, and one guard regiment. They also provided a total of 4,630 artillery pieces. This constituted a significant bloc effort to expand its influence.\(^8\) The new evidence coming from China demonstrates that the Vietnamese were clients of the Chinese during this period. Nonetheless, although Vietnamese leaders publicly declared that "we could not have defeated France without China's help," many Western critics continue to portray the effort as almost completely indigenous with minimal and ineffective bloc support.\(^9\) In fact, however, China's new role in Southeast Asia represented an active attempt by

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88. For comparison, at the height of the Huk rebellion in the Philippines in the same period, the communists only fielded a maximum of 15,000 armed troops. Macdonald, Adventures in Chaos, p. 153; Kerkvliet, The Huk Rebellion, p. 210. Estimated communist guerrilla strength in Malaya at the beginning of the armed insurgency in 1948 was 4,000. Stubbs, Hearts and Minds in Guerrilla Warfare, p. 87.
the Soviet bloc's regional leader to expand the revolution, in good part under the general direction of the international strategic planning of the Soviet Union.

Conclusions

U.S. and other Western leaders did not misperceive either the actions or the intentions of the Soviet Union and other communists in the early Cold War. Much of the newly available evidence confirms many traditionalist analytical assumptions about bloc expansion, in particular that there was a system-wide Soviet bloc threat with a significant amount of unity, and that this bloc was both held together and driven to expand its sphere of influence by the shared totalist ideological tenets of Marxism-Leninism, largely as defined in Moscow.

As traditionalism, post-revisionism, and realism might predict, Soviet bloc expansion occurred when there was a power and policy vacuum. It was largely deterred when relatively coherent Western policies made it clear that expansion would be costly. The Soviets expanded into Asia not in reaction to Western provocations or fear of Western expansion, as realist theory might predict according to the assumptions of the security dilemma, but because of a combination of the lack of Western actions and the existence of ideologically driven opportunism, as traditionalism more clearly predicts. It was the relatively robust containment policies in Europe and the Middle East that made the Soviets cautious and checked their expansion. What varied most among the regions surrounding the Soviet Union in the early Cold War was the Western response, not the Soviet bloc interest in spreading revolution.90 Realists argue that revolutionaries lose their ambition for spreading the revolution and become "socialized" into the system fairly soon after coming to power.91 Yet thirty years after the Bolshevik Revolution, Stalin still saw such policies as viable. This calls into question the influential realist assumption that ideology does not matter to statesmen, and its general disparagement of long-term revolutionary goals.

Post-revisionists and realists do not explain the revolutionary outbreaks in Asia well because they underestimate the levels of coordination of international communist policies in the early Cold War. They could credibly posit such an argument until recently because there was relatively little primary evidence of Soviet and Chinese motivations for their actions. The new evidence that has

90. I am indebted to Jim Wirtz for helpful comments on these points.
91. See Waltz, Theory of International Politics, pp. 127-128; Walt, "Revolution and War," passim.
reached the West thus far, however, strongly supports many of the original traditionalist assumptions of an expansionist, internationalist, revolutionary communist movement: sort of an underground epistemic community with weapons.

In contrast to traditionalism, many realists and post-revisionists portray communist alignment choices essentially as reactions to Western provocations. Since state behavior is viewed as reactions to threats within the security dilemma, Soviet bloc alignment behavior is explained by portraying it as a failure of the West, and especially the United States, to restrain itself. According to this logic, bloc members' policies were predominantly reactive. The realist view, and especially its "balance of threat" variant, must explain the Soviet bloc as largely the creation of little more than discrete balancing reactions to external Western provocations if it is to remain logically consistent. Applying realist and post-revisionist predictions suggests that if only the West had been less threatening in its actions and had offered the right degree of conciliation, the security dilemma might have been overcome, many of these misunderstandings might have been averted, and perhaps the Cold War avoided. By ignoring ideational factors, realists cause basic misunderstandings over why these entities acted as they did.

Power politics assumptions minus ideological factors do not explain well the dynamic revolutionary nature of the Soviet Union's anti-status quo policies and its willingness and ability to use "fifth column" surrogates to pursue international goals. Because states are seen according to the famous billiard-ball metaphor in realism, that is, as completely discrete entities, the concept of an ideologically driven bloc made up of both governments and non-ruling groups is beyond the capacity of realism alone to explain or predict adequately. The effects of bloc members' local successes on the willingness of the Soviet Union as bloc leader to interpret capitalism as in general crisis and to take risks elsewhere are also either ignored or poorly understood. Stalin's ideology led him to generalize from a particular failure of the United States to respond in China and assume that the U.S. policy response would be similarly confused elsewhere in the region. U.S. claims that China was a special case went un-

92. See Walt, The Origins of Alliances, chap. 8. Although Walt plays down the importance of ideology, he does emphasize that power analysis divorced from perceptions is a sterile exercise. Walt's own data demonstrate that the United States ended the Cold War with roughly a 2:1 advantage in allies over the Soviet Union. Inferring motives from results, this strongly suggests that most states saw the Soviet Union as more threatening than the United States, and that U.S. actions generally attracted rather than repelled allies.
heeded in the communist world because Marxism-Leninism preached that capitalist great powers fail to respond to revolutions because of acute internal crises. Thus relative U.S. restraint in Asia, its “waiting for the dust to settle” in Dean Acheson’s famous phrase, did not convince Stalin to seek cooperation, but rather to attack.

The realist assumption of undifferentiated motivations among states obscures real differences in methods of perception and the purposes of collective behavior. It might have done the Chinese communists more good to have remained officially neutral, like Yugoslavia, India, Indonesia, and other anti-imperialist nations. However, China’s Marxist-Leninist leadership, blinded by a revolutionary hubris caused by its very political success, was convinced that it was part of a larger global social revolution that could expect only hostility from a world dominated by capitalist imperialism. Materialist theories cannot explain or predict the potential appeal of Marxism-Leninism as a global revolution—a means for “liberation” both domestically and internationally—in the unsettled days following a global conflict in nations seething with resentment over past injustices. In such a worldview, at such a time, allying with past oppressors or trying to avoid taking a stand might have been objectively rational but was not subjectively possible. Every actual or imagined slight by Westerners was interpreted as typical capitalist great-power chauvinism. Yet substantial demands visited on them by the Soviets were largely embraced in the name of socialist internationalism. If ideology does not matter much, and any Chinese government would have seen its position in the same material and power terms as the security dilemma suggests, one might ask what would have happened if Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) had won the Chinese Civil War. Perhaps he would have followed similar policies and joined the Soviet bloc in promoting revolution in Southeast Asia, but this seems highly doubtful. The inclusion of ideology helps explain both bloc solidarity and expansion. This is not to say that ideology always helps to unify a bloc; the Sino-Soviet splits of the 1960s show that this is not the case. But it took a decade of disappointment between the two communist giants before China turned away from the bloc, and a second decade of growing hostility with the Soviet Union before the Chinese began to lose their global revolutionary ambitions.93

Realists and post-revisionists can play down these ideational factors only by projecting backward some of the subsequent centrifugal political pressures in the bloc, brought about as ruling communist parties increasingly questioned

93. I would like to thank Bob Kaufman and Randy Schweller for helping me frame these issues.
Moscow's control. Thus realism and post-revisionism do not explain either the formation or maintenance of the Soviet bloc in the early Cold War as well as do traditionalist assumptions about the importance of ideology. It is also now clear that U.S. decision-makers anticipated those long-term fissures within the bloc, but had to deal in the short term with a good deal of revolutionary expansionism.

The revisionist paradigm for understanding the Cold War has failed the test of the new evidence. In particular, the view of the Soviet Union and other communist nations as inherently cautious status-quo powers is not tenable. Stalin's vaunted caution was caused by the very Western containment policies in Europe and the Middle East that the revisionists blame for the Cold War. In Asia, the one region where there was no early unified Western response, the Soviets and their ruling and non-ruling bloc clients planned and attempted revolutionary uprisings on a region-wide scale in an ideologically driven power move. Revisionists cannot explain this coordinated expansionism. They instead portray any such moves as strictly based in local conditions with little Soviet or Chinese direction or even input. Soviet control over ruling bloc members' international policies and non-ruling bloc members' revolutionary policies in the Stalinist period was at times monolithic, at times not, but it was almost always great. Western threat perceptions of a militant, revolutionary grouping under Stalin's international leadership were therefore justified. The new evidence demonstrates conclusively that the revisionists have been wide of the mark in their efforts to explain the Soviet Union, other Marxist-Leninists, and the Cold War.

Anders Stephanson has questioned the apparent desire among many analysts of U.S. foreign policy for synthesis and consensus. Perhaps what is needed instead, he argues, is increased competition among contending schools of thought. This is likely to happen given the depth of the challenge to existing schools posed by the new evidence on the Cold War emanating from the East. Despite its absence from the debate in recent decades, the new traditionalism will be at the center of that intellectual ferment.