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The Hope for Peace & the Case for War in the Postwar Soviet Union

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

by

Shawn Cecconi

May 2022

Dr. Henry J. Antkiewicz, Chair

Dr. Stephen G. Fritz

Dr. Michelle L. Crumley

Keywords: Soviet Union, Russia, Joseph Stalin, Cold War

ABSTRACT

The Hope for Peace & the Case for War in the Postwar Soviet Union

by

Shawn Cecconi

The postwar Soviet Union remained militarized and failed to reform itself because of its ideological concerns against the West and its new satellite states, all at the cost of the Soviet people. This analysis will compare the Soviet government's external focus and the Soviet people's domestic problems in the aftermath of the Second World War. The country's ideological, military, and imperial concerns abroad emphasized militarization over domestic revitalization. The Soviet people widely expected significant action from their government to remedy economic and political issues. The Soviet government nevertheless committed itself in focusing on outside concerns regardless of the harsh reality of everyday postwar society.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The Origins of the Soviet Paradigm

The postwar Soviet Union remained militarized and failed to reform itself because of its ideological concerns against the West and its new satellite states, all at the cost of the Soviet people. This analysis will compare the Soviet government's external focus and the Soviet people's domestic problems in the aftermath of the Second World War. The country's ideological, military, and imperial concerns abroad emphasized militarization over domestic revitalization. The Soviet people widely expected significant action from their government to remedy economic and political problems. The Soviet government nevertheless committed itself in focusing on outside concerns regardless of the harsh reality of everyday postwar society.

This paper attempts to prove the significance of international issues within Soviet priorities. It does not argue that these priorities existed by themselves within Soviet thinking. The country was an insular society that mostly remained closed to the West. Joseph Stalin's conception of "socialism in one country" made it clear that domestic priorities mattered.¹ The combination of Marxist-Leninist ideals and a changed postwar world meant that domestic priorities were more neglected. This was not so simple as a black and white change. There is a complex synthesis between international and domestic priorities within Soviet thinking. A new heavy industrial factory could supply manufacturing capability and bolster the number working class people within the country. It could also contribute to the nation's military-industrial complex, indirectly protecting against capitalist threats outside the country. If the machine tools for the factory came

¹ Joseph Stalin, *The Foundations of Leninism*, 2nd ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1924), accessed March 27, 2022, <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1924/foundations-leninism/ch03.htm>.

from war reparations from East Germany or the factory builds equipment to support the industrialization of a satellite state, then the factory assumes an imperialist dimension too. Both international and domestic priorities are involved in its consideration. The result is a combination of ideological, military, and imperial priorities that Soviet authorities followed in the postwar era. This trifecta of decision making led the country's leadership to embark on often contradictory and shameless foreign policy to achieve their goals.

This paper also connects peace with the West and domestic reforms for the Soviet people as they were really two sides of the same coin or kopek. An ideological viewpoint proves peace and domestic improvements were both synonymous and impossible in the postwar years. True peace with the West could only ideologically occur when all societies were classless. More bluntly, the West would have to cease to exist for a world of classless societies to occur. This paper will show that Soviet leadership was convinced the start of this process would begin within several decades at most.² Only then, could the Soviet Union say that it was on the cusp of achieving communism and the people could rest easy. Society would no longer have to remain militarized in the face of the capitalist threat. Light industry and consumer goods could come before military production. The country could import food without fear of compromising collectivization. For the nation and its people, everything rode upon this future. This utopian vision would never have come close to taking place under the postwar Stalinist consensus. In comparison, the Khrushchev years involved at least some domestic reforms, increased consumer goods, and attempts at compromise with the West. Although none of these necessarily reached their full potential. This

² Joseph Stalin, "Stalin on the Inevitability of War with Capitalism," 1952, *Bol'shevik*, No. 18 (September 1952), pp. 1-50., *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, accessed March 14, 2022, <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1947-2/cold-war/cold-war-texts/stalin-on-the-inevitability-of-war-with-capitalism/>.

lost potential stemmed from the Stalinist world view that Khrushchev did not actually renounce. This paper explores the original rejected diplomatic options and suppressed societal demands that preceded the Khrushchev years.

In the context of the continued survival of the West, the Khrushchev years were an anathema to Soviet postwar policies. The change required a rejection of the party line that never would have been possible before his de-Stalinization speech in 1956. Soviet priorities after Khrushchev decidedly shifted from the final years of Stalin and realized at least some postwar possibilities. But in the context of the immediate postwar years, that is irrelevant. The real question is why did this change not occur earlier either in foreign or domestic policy? There are the previously mentioned ideological hurdles, although Khrushchev did surmount many of those after Stalin's death. If Stalin was to blame, then there theoretically should have been a chance in 1953 when he died. There was also the turbulent postwar international system, which had yet to fully solidify and allow for any stable *détente*.³ Yet the postwar Soviet diplomacy still followed the spirit of wartime cooperation with the West which could have alleviated tensions. Perhaps all the variables for peace existed and simply did not coincide. If that is really the case, then it only represents another great tragedy in this comedy of errors.

Internally, the Soviet Union was a society that endured the First World War, the Russian Civil War, war communism, collectivization, the Five-Year Plans, and the Second World War. On top of this, Stalin alluded to at least three more Five-Year Plans, sustained militarization, and

³ Norman M. Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe: The Postwar Struggle for Sovereignty* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, Belknap Press, 2019), 8.

the economic burden of a Soviet empire to face future Western aggression according to Stalin.⁴ This seemingly endless wartime mentality stems from Soviet leadership adopting a paranoid, Marxist approach in their perspective towards the West. The need to carry on pursuing this ideological course was in some ways a natural product of continued tragedy. The Soviet experience was continuous perseverance of crises, so why would the postwar years be any different? Stalin fully equated the postwar era with the interwar years and expected everything to end in another war just like in 1939.⁵ There were differences in Soviet society compared to the past, however. Red Army soldiers fought through highly developed Central Europe and favored various changes back home. Soviet citizens experienced both a window of domestic development in the 1930s and a wave of optimistic propaganda of their future. At least some Soviet leaders were optimistic that the society that won against fascism was now capable of a change of course. Yet this was a Pandora's box of change that would only begin to rear its head in 1956. In the meantime, the nation committed itself over juggling its immediate postwar concerns through its traditional perspective. Soviet society would become burdened under continued wartime measures and a paranoid vision of the future for some time to come.

⁴ Joseph Stalin, "Speech Delivered by Stalin at a Meeting of Voters of the Stalin Electoral District, Moscow," February 9, 1946, *Gospolitizdat*, Moscow, 1946., History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116179>, 14.

⁵ Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael Boro Petrovich (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1992), 114-5.

CHAPTER 2. INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

Ideology, Imperialism, & The Capitalist Threat

The Soviet Union's ideological, military, and imperial concerns abroad emphasized militarization over domestic revitalization. The country entered a chaotic postwar international environment after the Second World War while suffering with a war-torn homeland that left them vulnerable. But the country also emerged from the war with a renewed sense of ideological legitimacy and pride. The Soviets viewed the postwar West as the same as interwar Europe, a doomed system that would either tear itself apart or direct its violence towards the Soviet Union again. The Kremlin leadership thus decided that external problems were the most pressing matter the country had at the time. Any actions taken by the West were inherently dangerous when viewed through this pessimistic ideological prism. This resulted in standoffish or aggressive diplomacy, militarism, and imperialism in any Soviet policies and agendas. The chance for peace in Europe would drift further away as these actions alienated the West. In most cases, alternative options existed that offered relief to these tensions. Such actions could preserve Soviet security and stability at a lower cost than intensifying the Cold War. At the same time, the Soviet home front benefited and suffered from Soviet external policies. The borders of the Soviet bloc expanded, providing safety and the resources of imperial holdings. These advantages came at a heavy cost of tensions with the West, material aid for satellite states, and continuous militarism, all at the cost of Soviet society.

1945 represented a watershed moment for both the legitimacy of communism and its capability on the world stage. Decades earlier, the ideology existed in its infancy behind a nebulous curtain of Soviet secrecy. The war legitimized the ideology through its victory over Nazism in the Great Patriotic War, the Soviet name for the Second World War. Joseph Stalin

gave a speech at the Bolshoi Theater in 1946 that described their new postwar reality. He said that the “war was the fiercest and most arduous ever fought in the history of our Motherland” that acted as “an examination of our Soviet system.” The results of this examination revealed that “first of all, our Soviet *social* system was victorious,” he said, because it’s “a genuinely people's system, which grew up from the ranks of the people.” The statement ties the war’s victory to the legitimacy of communist ideals. “Secondly,” he said, “our victory signifies that our Soviet *state* system was victorious, that our multinational Soviet state passed all the tests of the war and proved its viability.” The Soviet Union was a multinational state composed of different ethnic and cultural divisions. Stalin argues that critics outside the Soviet Union predicted “that the Soviet Union would share the fate of Austria-Hungary.”⁶ The success of the multiethnic empire under one banner was another vindication of the Soviet social system in holding them together under the threat of war (ignoring failed attempts to break free during the war).⁷ It was also a harbinger of the imperialist tendencies of Soviet thinking. If the country could hold together ethnic groups from Estonia to Siberia, why couldn’t the country hold their occupied European states under a similar system?

The third point in Stalin’s speech was the most nuanced and led into his postwar national priorities. He commended the success of the Red Army in enduring the war and defeating the enemy.⁸ But he then explains that none of these victories would have been possible if not for the industrial ability derived from the Five-Year Plans.⁹ He harps on how “it would be impossible to

⁶ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 6-7.

⁷ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 119.

⁸ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

defend our country without heavy industry” the plans developed. The country would now need “perhaps, another three Five-Year Plans, if not more,” to defend against a potential future foreign threat. “But it can be done, and we must do it.”¹⁰ These original plans certainly helped prepare the country to fight in the war. Yet the industrial drives also extracted a heavy human toll. Vyacheslav Molotov, one of Stalin’s closest magnates, recalled that while the Five-Year Plans were necessary, “The people went through a colossal strain before the war...And still there were things that cannot be justified” beyond that.¹¹ Despite this cost, the Soviets had no alternative outside of a Marxist-Leninist preparation for the next war. Further actions justified in this manner would take place both at home and abroad which would further justify Molotov’s critique that “there were things that cannot be justified.”¹²

The lofty perspectives of the postwar Soviet Union even served to alienate growing efforts to introduce socialism in Eastern Europe. Yugoslavian communist Milovan Djilas recalled the aftermath of trying to resolve an issue on unruly Red Army troops. After explaining the situation “in an extremely mild and polite form,” the Soviet delegate quickly protested “against such insinuations” which were comparable to “armies of capitalist countries.”¹³ Djilas soon received the label of a “Trotskyist” behind closed doors and Soviet passive aggressiveness then expanded through the media and diplomatic channels.¹⁴ In a “coup de grâce,” Stalin mocked

¹⁰ Ibid., 14.

¹¹ Feliks Ivanovich Chuev, Vyacheslav Mikhaylovich Molotov, and Albert Resis, *Molotov Remembers: Inside Kremlin Politics: Conversations with Felix Chuev* (Chicago: I.R. Dee, 1993), 25.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 88.

¹⁴ Ibid., 90.

the entire delegation. He asked why the Yugoslavs had to be hostile to a Soviet “soldier who has crossed thousands of kilometers through blood and fire and death” to have “fun with a woman” on Yugoslavian clay.¹⁵ Djilas’s lesson from the affair was that the Soviets embodied “arrogance and a rebuff typical of a big state toward a small one, of the strong toward the weak”¹⁶ These “hegemonistic” tendencies ultimately placed Soviet nationalism and military-ideological pride above any semblance of socialist fraternity. This reality convinced Stalin “that his society contained no contradictions and that it exhibited superiority to other societies in every way,” Djilas concluded.¹⁷

Regardless of whether a country was capitalist or socialist, in Soviet eyes, they existed within a unilateral framework that left little room for compromise on even minor issues. This would become of extreme importance when interacting with the West and deciding Soviet policies after the fact. The hubris surrounding Soviet ideals easily extended into foreign and domestic policies. Soviet leadership understood that their victory in the war was an opportunity for expanding their ideology across Europe and the world. Molotov recalled that “our system passed the test of war, as did our party and our people.” The key was the ideological and nationalist “great historical destiny and fateful mission of the Russian people—...to be the universal, all-embracing humanitarian union of nations.”¹⁸ At a party after the war, Molotov put this reality more candidly. In a toast to Stalin, he declared “If you weren’t Stalin, the USSR would not have...conquered such an empire for socialism.” According to historian Simon

¹⁵ Ibid., 95.

¹⁶ Ibid., 91.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 188.

Montefiore, this toast “pleased” Stalin, who was usually reluctant to receive such unabashed praise.¹⁹

The Kremlin’s growing imperial pride compares with traditional Russian imperialism. In fact, such a model could help in understanding Soviet imperialism. But as Molotov argued, this was not simply classic “Great Russian chauvinism but historical truth.” At its heart, the Kremlin believed Marxist-Leninism was on the cusp of another moment in world history that they intended to take full advantage of as Lenin once did.²⁰ Of course, reality was often different than Kremlin thinking. These assurances of the future coincided with a shift in Soviet attitudes towards the West over the postwar system. At the Potsdam Conference, Winston Churchill complained that the Soviets were exerting too much control in Central Europe. Molotov recalls that the prime minister argued, “but Lvov was never a Russian city!” Stalin replied, “but Warsaw was.”²¹ Stalin’s not so subtle recognition of the implicit restoration of imperial borders and more shows his willingness to follow old imperial notions when it helped them over the capitalists. These borders would also guarantee the spread of socialism and protect the Soviet Union from military threats.

The Second World War’s conclusion altered how the Soviet Union perceived its wartime allies overall. Stalin and many of his associates became convinced again of the threat the Western Allies posed to Soviet interests. These concerns increasingly directed the country to carry on building a military-industrial complex at the cost of its domestic sphere. This postwar

¹⁹ Simon Sebag Montefiore, *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar* (London: Phoenix, 2014), 583.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 53.

militarism would have continued growing unabated if not for Stalin's death.²² But the civilian economy still faced a tremendous military-industrial complex that was difficult to reduce given an ideological and political need for it.²³ Stalin's 1946 speech reveals many core expectations the Soviet Union held about the West's perceived militarism and instability. He begins with an outline of the Marxist interpretation of the causes of the Second World War. He says, "the war broke out as the inevitable result of the development of world economic and political forces on the basis of present-day monopolistic capitalism." This state of capitalism vs. fascism was certainly new, but the processes that led to the war were quite familiar to the Soviet Union. Stalin reflected that "the development of world capitalism in our times does not proceed smoothly and evenly, but through crises and catastrophic wars." He provides the example of the First World War as a similar conflict. He further explains that the global economic and political systems created by capitalist nations inevitably lead to instability and armed conflict.²⁴

State sanctioned popular media reflected the Kremlin's own sentiments towards the West. Author and journalist Pyotr Pavlenko's novel *Happiness*, a winner of the prestigious Stalin Prize, includes numerous reflections on the West and its relation to the Soviet Union. The main character, Col. Voropayev, acts as head interpreter for several British and American delegates in Crimea near the end of the war. Voropayev observes that Delano Roosevelt was a "great man"

²² Vladislav Martinovič Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev*, Paperback edition., The New Cold War History (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 85.

²³ Sheila Fitzpatrick, "War and Society in Soviet Context: Soviet Labor Before, During, and after World War II," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, no. 35 (1989): 45.

²⁴ Stalin, "Speech Delivered by Stalin," 3-4.

that inspired “good impressions upon those around him.”²⁵ These sentiments mirror that of even Stalin himself, who stated later in his life that “Roosevelt was a great statesman...and liberal leader who prolonged the life of capitalism.”²⁶ Voropayev then observed that Churchill on the other hand, was a “tired businessman” who was “obese and senile-looking.” At best, he could say that Churchill was more “astonishing rather than likeable.”²⁷ Pavlenko’s description of Churchill as a rather stereotypical “businessman” would have tied the prime minister to capitalism within the eyes of Soviet readers. Voropayev’s discussions with an American journalist named Harris reveal even more. He argues that “your bankers have but one aim: to convert America into a stronghold of militarism, and Churchill will thank heaven that he had managed in time to make such good militarists of them. Churchill is their god, not Roosevelt. Roosevelt is too good for them.”²⁸ Voropayev notably connects the banking sector and Western militarism. For a Soviet reader in 1947, the passage implicitly justified aggressive Soviet militarism, diplomacy, and imperialism abroad. The West appeared deceptive as it switched from the image of Roosevelt’s perceived cooperation to Cold War mistrust. Soviet actions appeared to simply stand in opposition of perceived capitalist aggression.

This overall rejection of anything in the West considered capitalist would play an important and nuanced role in Soviet analysis of the early Cold War. A year before *Happiness* released, George Kennan, an American diplomat in Moscow, sent a secret telegram back to the

²⁵ Pyotr Pavlenko, *Happiness*, trans. J. Fineberg (Foreign Language Publishing House, 1950), accessed March 10, 2022, <http://archive.org/details/pyotr-pavlenko-happiness./>, 287.

²⁶ Montefiore, *Stalin*, 496.

²⁷ Pavlenko, *Happiness*, 287.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 307-8.

United States underlining how the Soviet Union was a threat to American affairs and how to tackle the problem.²⁹ The worsening affairs and Kennan's "long telegram" (1946) all contributed to already icy Soviet-American relations. Despite the telegram's secrecy, Stalin himself was aware of its contents and organized a response. Nikolai Novikov, Soviet ambassador to the United States (1946-1947), created the response to the telegram which reflected the official Soviet stance on rapidly chilling Soviet-American relations. The document was important enough to call for the significant involvement of Molotov, who was Minister of Foreign Affairs at the time. The archival document of the telegram even shows Molotov's underlining throughout. Novikov argued that the United States was quickly being "consumed by a desire for world domination." He also summarized a variety of increasing American military and economic activities around the world.³⁰

Many of these concerns were based in the understatement of the century that "US foreign policy is...quite different from that which existed in the prewar period."³¹ A closer examination of many of Novikov's points reveals an ideological blindness that hurt the Soviet analysis of the situation. He argues that in Eastern Europe, "democratic regimes have also been created and...maintain relations with the Soviet Union on the basis of friendship and mutual aid

²⁹ George F. Kennan, "Long Telegram," (History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, February 22, 1946), <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/116178>, 29.

³⁰ Nikolai Novikov, "Telegram from Nikolai Novikov, Soviet Ambassador to the US, to the Soviet Leadership," trans. Gary Goldberg (History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, September 27, 1946), <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110808>, 1-2.

³¹ Ibid.

agreements.”³² In contrast to these supposed democratization efforts, American activities in Western Europe were perceived as “a serious danger to peace.”³³ Molotov characterized the governments of capitalist countries as dictatorships “of the bourgeoisie” as opposed to the proletariat.³⁴ The actual political character of these governments meant little compared to their economic and ultimately ideological credentials. This assessment easily translated into interpretations of Western actions in a hostile manner. Novikov specifically focuses on the “anti-Soviet” occupation of western Germany. He contends that American de-Nazification policies failed to remove either capitalists or large land holders and constituted a failure to implement “democratic principles” within the Soviet conception. His arguments in opposition of industrialization over an “agrarian policy” may allude to the failed Morgenthau Plan. Such a plan would have been devastating for the postwar German economy and people. Regardless, his support of such a policy may allude to its ability to satisfy Soviet paranoia of a renewed postwar Germany. This callousness over human lives in Germany was a complex issue. Both Novikov and Stalin’s Bolshoi Theater speech invoke the legacy of two world wars and Germany’s role in invading Russia.³⁵ The perceived culpability of Germany was a significant influence in keeping them down. Western efforts to revitalize the country outside of socialist principles were a threat, regardless of whether that was really the case. Soviet designs for Germany were initially fluid

³² Ibid., 3.

³³ Ibid., 10.

³⁴ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 379.

³⁵ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 4; Novikov, “Telegram from Nikolai Novikov,” 2.

beyond these ideological considerations though. This stemmed from Stalin's own "flexible and probing approach" to international relations which he followed through the postwar era.³⁶

This flexible approach could involve drastic actions like aggressive diplomacy. Historian John Gaddis points out that in quick succession, Stalin challenged the postwar status quo with the Western Allies over Iran, the territorial sovereignty of Turkey, and in the administration of Italian colonies in North Africa.³⁷ If he succeeded, he would have easily gained the Soviet Union more ideological and military parity with the West. He would have also furthered the reach of the rapidly expanding Soviet empire and provided it access to the Mediterranean Sea and Iranian oil supplies. Yet Stalin overreached with his diplomacy and spooked his allies. The Anglo-Americans would increasingly take a hardline stance against Soviet diplomatic excesses abroad.³⁸ On the other hand, there was a more pragmatic side of Stalin's calculations, too. Djilas observes that during the Greek Civil War, instead of aiding the communist side as anticipated, Stalin declared that "Greece is a different case [from China]—we should not hesitate but let us put an end to the Greek uprising." He explained that unlike the Chinese Civil War, "the United States is directly engaged there—the strongest state in the world." Djilas himself was more cynical of Stalin's motives, speculating that if a real war started, it could, "if not drag him into war, then endanger his already-won positions."³⁹ Thus, there were two lines Stalin avoided crossing in the postwar years. The first was his conception of Marxist-Leninist principles. The second was that Stalin was cautious enough to not push diplomatic opportunities far enough to

³⁶ Naimark, *Stalin and the Fate of Europe*, 8.

³⁷ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (London: Penguin Books, 2007), 28.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 182-3.

risk war. The Soviet Union may have used jingoist, Marxist rhetoric, but it did not want another world war. This was not entirely clear to the West, however.

Stalin's diplomatic flexibility reached some major limits on the future of Germany. The country had become a threat to Soviet interests twice in Stalin's lifetime. Djilas heard him saying that "No, they will recover, and very quickly... Give them twelve to fifteen years and they'll be on their feet again."⁴⁰ This Marxist-historical argument became official Soviet policy. In 1952, Stalin argued in the Soviet newspaper *Pravda* that "Germany revived and rose to her feet as a great power within some 15 to 20 years after her defeat" in the First World War. American aid to Germany was accelerating a second revival of "her economic war potential," Stalin observed. So far, Soviet predictions were that the militarist tendencies of capitalists would be between themselves and not the Soviet Union. But he concluded, "In order to eliminate the inevitability of wars [Western] imperialism must be destroyed."⁴¹ This last statement became a feedback loop. The Soviet Union could only ensure domestic tranquility by avoiding it to work on militarism, socialism, and imperialism abroad. This angered Western powers, which in turn threatened Soviet security. Stalin seemed flexible in Soviet diplomacy. This trifecta of priorities meant that Soviet foreign policy was on a foregone path. Historian Vladislav Zubok used the phrase "revolutionary-imperial paradigm" to characterize this all-consuming issue that the Soviet Union existed under.⁴² Djilas explains that the earliest comprehensive German policy he heard in 1946 argued for an entirely communist Germany. He points out that this idea seemed absurd and wrapped up in the Soviet heady "flush of military victories and by their hopes for the economic

⁴⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁴¹ Stalin, "Stalin on the Inevitability of War with Capitalism," 1-50.

⁴² Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 19.

and other dissolution of Western Europe.” In late 1947, he heard a new concept from Stalin himself. Djilas recorded Stalin saying, “The West will make Western Germany their own, and we shall turn Eastern Germany into our own state.”⁴³ When implemented, this policy would sour relations with the West and bring East Germany completely into the Soviet camp. Such an action would have been difficult to reverse and showed Stalin’s newfound belief that further successful unilateral diplomacy was fading.

Yet on the surface, there appeared to be further opportunities for a united Germany and a reduction of Cold War tensions. On March 10, 1952, Stalin provided the West with the first of a series of notes proposing a neutral Germany once again. The first note provides a list of innocuous and agreeable terms for the reunification and normalization of Germany. It included proposals guaranteeing the rights of Germans, plans of holding elections, and the idea of future German neutrality.⁴⁴ The fundamental flaw with the document began with the West’s increasing understanding of Soviet ideological thinking. The American response to the letter responded warmly to the overall ideas proposed. Yet the Americans also picked apart the duplicity of the letter. The letter’s open interpretation allowed for the real possibility of significant Soviet and German Democratic Republic (GDR) influence in whatever future nation emerged out of the deal.⁴⁵ The creation of a truly neutral Germany could also contradict the evolving socialist movement and damage the credibility of the ideology if it did not respect the Kremlin’s wishes in

⁴³ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 153-4.

⁴⁴ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, ed., *Background Documents on Germany 1944-1959* (Washington, D.C: Government Printing Office, 1959), accessed March 10, 2022, http://archive.org/details/BackgroundDocumentsOnGermany1944-1959., 86-7.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

any major ways. A later agreement between the Soviets and Germans backed the first cooperative assumption. The document concluded that the GDR was the “bulwark of the struggle of German people for a united, peace-loving democratic Germany.”⁴⁶ The specific phrasing of “peace-loving” follows Soviet “struggle for peace” propaganda which the West would have considered a dog whistle covering Marxist-Leninist ideals.⁴⁷ This concept was the public face of the conception that the capitalist world was aggressive while the socialist one was not. The agreement therefore makes clear that a unified “peace-loving” Germany would have to be in the socialist camp.

Soviet and GDR leadership remained on the course of introducing socialism to East Germany despite widespread East German backlash as well. In 1953, a worker’s uprising occurred that demanded a relaxation of the breakneck socialist policies which hurt the living standards of everyday Germans. The revolt demonstrated many problems with the socialist course within East Germany and Soviet imperial extraction. A report issued to the Kremlin afterwards first claimed that fascists and American intelligence services riled up the working-class demonstrators. After further blaming American capitalist influence for much of the affair, it then pragmatically recommends economic and political reforms to solve the problem. Most notably, the report blames the East German plan of “the construction of socialism, regardless of

⁴⁶ Ibid., 86.

⁴⁷ Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee, “Resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (CC VKP(b)),” trans. Nigel Gould-Davies, September 1, 1952, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111510.>, 2.

any difficulties,” a faulty one that alienated the people.⁴⁸ It even calls for the removal from power of Walter Ulbricht, a notable leader of the GDR. More importantly for the Soviets, it recommended more food imports, a halt in reparations payments, fees for Red Army occupation reduced, and the legitimizing of East German marks in relation to Soviet currency.⁴⁹ If followed through, the document would stand as a major shift in Soviet policies towards the GDR.

Behind the paper’s knee jerk accusations of the West, there was a spectrum of Soviet ideological, imperial, and military influences that created such dissatisfaction. The prevention of resurgent German militarism and the creation of a fellow socialist state did play a significant role in the revolt. But for several years after the war’s conclusion, the Soviet Union benefited from various forms of appropriation in their occupation zone. Stalin made it an immediate priority in 1945 to begin stripping all industrial equipment in areas of Berlin that belonged to the Western occupation zones prior to the West’s arrival in these areas.⁵⁰ This equipment would be valuable in restoring and increasing the industrial capabilities of the Soviet Union. Later that year, the policy evolved to avoid depleting the Soviet occupation zone. You cannot have a working-class without factories after all. Instead, stock companies were set up to control a large minority of East Germany’s industries. Zubok observes that “Soviet interests in Germany were so diverse

⁴⁸ Pavel F. Yudin, V. S. Semenov, and V. Sokolovski, “Report from Vasili Sokolovskii, Vladimir Semyonov, and Pavel Yudin, ‘On the Events of 17-19 June 1953 in Berlin and the GDR and Certain Conclusions from these Events,’” June 24, 1953, Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation; translated by Danny Rozas., History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/113132.>, 2-3.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

⁵⁰ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 64.

and contradictory that...officials continually had to walk the tightrope.”⁵¹ This imperial extraction of German resources partially stemmed from legitimate and illegitimate reparations for the war. The industries of the original Five-Year plans were mostly on the west side of the Soviet Union devastated by war. Stalin even tactfully acknowledged this failure in his Bolshoi Theater speech.⁵² But the policy likely echoed Tsarist imperialism through its callousness to its occupation of similar lands. This resource extraction was occurring across non-Soviet parts of the future Soviet bloc as well. Djilas saw that the wealth of these countries “was being extracted in various ways” and only occasionally paid off using old worthless German currency. He saw the “impotence and subservience among the Rumanian authorities” that made his compatriots likely thank their red stars that they had liberated Yugoslavia and not the Soviets.⁵³

Central and Eastern European countries under Soviet occupation further complicated any hope of military de-escalation because of what these countries provided to the Soviet Union. These future socialist neighbors offered the Soviet Union a defense against future invasions, socialist brotherhood, and imperial resources. The only major policy shift involved slowing these measures to avoid too much dissatisfaction within these countries. Molotov recalled that the final consensus in the Kremlin was that “a more cautious approach must be employed” to achieve socialism until “it became possible to take this or that step with confidence, then accelerate the process.”⁵⁴ Whether this was a case of compassion or turning up the heat slowly enough for the occupied peoples not to realize is left unsaid. In August of 1953, Soviet and East German

⁵¹ Ibid., 69.

⁵² Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 12.

⁵³ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 139.

⁵⁴ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 334-5.

delegates met in Moscow to hash out a deal based on post-uprising conclusions and the evolving nature of Germany within Soviet calculations. On the face of it, the conference recognized the continual division of Germany presented a major problem for the entirety of the German people. A peace treaty and a unified Germany would remain to be a publicized goal of the two nations. The deal also initiated “a series of political and economic measures aimed at rendering assistance in the further development of the national economy of the GDR.” These changes furthered joint German-Soviet efforts “in the struggle for peace in Europe.” This agreement formalized several of the more moderate changes brought up in the report created after the worker’s uprising. This includes a relaxation or termination of several sets of reparation payments, loans, and occupation fees the East German government had been paying. It also included 590 million rubles of food and raw materials from the Soviet Union for the GDR and a large line of credit. Perhaps most importantly for many Germans, it included a pledge to finally release most wartime POWs who were still in labor camps in the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ The agreement in the context of the Soviet-German relationship appeared to be a radical departure from taking to giving.

Yet as far as Soviet ideological, military, and imperial concerns went, everything remained effectively the same. The Soviet occupation represented and would go on to represent a vast exchange of resources between the two countries. Only now it was more consensual on the surface. Soviet industry propped up by German machine tools would now rebuild East Germany.⁵⁶ In light of the famines occurring within the Soviet Union, the commitment of foodstuffs would seem wrong, but it was not that different from the difficulties in keeping the

⁵⁵ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Background Documents on Germany 1944-1959*, 113-4.

⁵⁶ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 114.

occupying Red Army fed either.⁵⁷ Most importantly, the conference signified the furthest move yet towards Soviet backed socialism. East Germany was even further committed in the paradoxical “struggle for peace” that pitted a supposedly peaceful communist bloc against a hostile capitalist West.⁵⁸ The conference notably ended just a day shy of the anniversary of the last Stalin note provided to the West. Soviet diplomacy appeared to have finished a drastic shift from conditional wartime diplomacy back to some semblance of pre-war spheres of influence. But given Stalin’s statement in 1947 to Djilas about Germany, the diplomatic policies changed less than they appeared to. The Soviet Union had successfully achieved most of its defensive and imperial goals in Germany. Now, it just needed to implement socialism. Soviet officials certainly had no realistic or comprehensive designs for the future of Germany in 1945. These same officials did keep to the broad ideal of unilaterally advancing Soviet interests and keeping Germany militarily suppressed. However, the Soviet Union now needed to defend against an evolving Western threat that had little trust in Soviet diplomacy.

Soviet leadership was quite ill-prepared to understand the relationship between America and Britain despite their wartime cooperation. Novikov’s telegram argues that in preparation for world domination, American activities were dividing the world “into American and British spheres of influence.” He did recognize that there was growing Anglo-American military and economic cooperation. In the short run, this cooperation would successfully reduce conflict between Western powers and enhance American economic dominance. Yet eventually, any Anglo-American cooperation would fail. American economic influence in both Britain and its colonies was “quite conflictive” and “a danger to Britain.” For example, he argues that the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁸ Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Background Documents on Germany 1944-1959*, 113.

British sterling bloc would fall under American influence and subvert Britain's economic independence. In the end, Novikov argues that one of the dependences or colonies of Britain would form the "focal point" of a new conflict.⁵⁹ In many ways, he was right. American economic influence eventually replaced the sterling bloc, American efforts at encouraging British decolonization worked, and American capital increasingly poured into Britain. Yet his conclusion that these changes would create conflict failed in the context of the Cold War. Part of this failure may stem from the Anglo-American special relationship or the increasing influence of decolonization in general. British priorities were the opposite of Moscow's beliefs as they favored remaining in the American camp, even at the cost of a weakened empire.⁶⁰ Regardless of the causes, Novikov's ideological interpretation of the West, Soviet diplomacy, and Soviet military posturing contributed to this intelligence failure. This would begin to cause too many differences in the alliance which would further reinforce Soviet insecurity.

Happiness has sections analyzing Anglo-American relations in a manner near identical to Novikov's sentiments. Voropayev observes of the Westerners in Crimea, that there was a "precariousness of the friendship between the sailors of the two kindred Allied powers" in which "each side sought and found occasion to quarrel."⁶¹ Upon receiving his duties as an interpreter, Voropayev finds out from another officer that "if the Americans and English start a scrap with each other, it will be your duty to pacify them."⁶² This inherent state of conflict between American and British sailors can be compared to the Soviet interpretation of Anglo-American

⁵⁹ Novikov, "Telegram from Nikolai Novikov," 8-9.

⁶⁰ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe Since 1945* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 295, 298-9.

⁶¹ Pavlenko, *Happiness*, 285.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 276.

relations in Novikov's telegram. Later, he openly discusses the future of England with the American journalist Harris. Voropayev describes Britain as America's "kept woman...promising to leave him a big legacy if he loves her while she lives." Harris mockingly responds later that "We are not rich enough to keep England." "But neither is England rich enough to yield herself to you for nothing," Voropayev responds.⁶³ His bitter retort reflects the belief of the inevitability of Anglo-American conflict stemming from the nature of capitalist values. The special relationship between the two certainly had problems the Soviets witnessed at the Tehran Conference (1943). For example, Roosevelt joined in a dark joke about executing German officers that deeply strained Churchill's sensitivities. Churchill equally observed after an under-the-table agreement with Stalin that the American "president would be shocked" by what they were doing.⁶⁴ This minor turbulence within Anglo-American relations may have been viewed through a Soviet lens of paranoid Marxist principles and wishful thinking that would have easily backed their own assumptions.

Stalin's speech at the Bolshoi Theater reveals the Soviet conclusion on what deteriorating relations would create. He uses the Second World War's origins as a conflict between Western countries to prove that capitalism naturally divides itself into warring factions. He calls this division a capitalist attempt to "redistribute 'spheres of influence'" when markets experience uneven growth and scarce resources.⁶⁵ Notably, this part of his speech shows that the assumption of a warlike and deteriorating West is based within Soviet ideological conceptions instead of real analysis. Stalin and some of his associates were avid readers, but there were significant gaps

⁶³ Ibid., 303.

⁶⁴ Montefiore, *Stalin*, 479, 485.

⁶⁵ Stalin, "Speech Delivered by Stalin," 4.

within their analysis of the outside world. Djilas observed on numerous occasions that Stalin and his associates often failed understanding basic information about their ally Yugoslavia, for example.⁶⁶ This observation may have been a part of his own biases, but he also observed that “Stalin was well acquainted with Russian literature—though only Russian—but the only real knowledge he had outside of Russian limits was his knowledge of political history.”⁶⁷ This was harsh criticism of a man who may have read five-hundred pages a day for most of his life. The Kremlin did seem to have a fascination with non-Russian literature at times. For example, the entire Politburo enjoyed *Last of the Mohicans* for its damning of Western Imperialism.⁶⁸ Djilas and Politburo’s tastes make it clear that assessments of the outside world would have been based in a paranoid and insular Marxist perspective. Gaddis writes that during this time, the bugged rooms that Western diplomats stayed in recorded their private discussions about “the need for cooperation in the reconstruction of Europe.” Nevertheless, Stalin at least trusted his own paranoia. Lenin, Novikov, and two world wars had proven to him that Western unity was temporary.⁶⁹

Many aspects of Stalin’s Bolshoi Theater speech and Novikov’s telegram ironically blame the West for a division of the world into spheres of influence. Stalin’s use of the phrase “spheres of influence” to critically describe Western international policy matches the Soviet Union’s own diplomatic policy.⁷⁰ The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was a clear example of how

⁶⁶ Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 155.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁶⁸ Montefiore, *Stalin*, 99.

⁶⁹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 31.

⁷⁰ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 9.

Soviet leadership wanted their own sphere of influence opposite of Nazi Germany. In comparison, Anglo-American intentions wished for the opposite of what the Soviets had labeled them with. Churchill and Roosevelt agreed during the war that the only way to achieve lasting peace was for increased postwar cooperation. This consensus hinged on international cooperation, a United Nations, Wilsonian self-determination, and increased economic cooperation.⁷¹ The United States hinted at this sustained belief in its first response to the Stalin note. The response argued that “such provisions would be a step backwards and might jeopardize the emergency in Europe of a new era in which international relations would be based on cooperation and not on rivalry and mistrust.” A world with a Soviet-backed “neutral” Germany would fundamentally ruin a higher ideal of “European unity.”⁷² The evolving consensus created between Churchill and Roosevelt showed that the world was attempting to move beyond the Kremlin’s ideological framework. Given Soviet ideological convictions, it seems unlikely that they recognized this shift. These intelligence failures within Soviet thinking were not necessarily inexcusable given the chaotic diplomatic environment of the late 1940s. The length of time Stalin and many of his associates persisted in their belief of these assumptions was inexcusable. In Stalin’s last major work, “Economic Problems of Socialism,” he argued that production within disintegrating capitalist countries will continue following cyclical recessions, but “the volume

⁷¹ Gaddis, *The Cold War*, 27.

⁷² Senate Foreign Relations Committee, *Background Documents on Germany 1944-1959*, 88.

of production in these countries will diminish.”⁷³ Molotov said that this was one of many “defects” that many of the magnates who “were bad at theory” failed to appreciate at the time.⁷⁴

The Soviets were certainly partially aware of ideological, diplomatic, and military factors that affected their beliefs of the West. Yet these concerns became nullified in the face of the legitimacy of the Second World War’s lessons. Obviously, the ideological perspective was already sacrosanct within the Soviet Union. Soviets had died over far less for saying otherwise under the regime. Molotov summarized that “Marxism is an objective science...It demands genuine, uncompromising struggle for the good.”⁷⁵ In that kind of black and white environment, it was difficult, but not necessarily impossible to compromise on an issue. Yet it would be difficult to rationalize any nuanced perspectives in a world with only good and bad players. For example, Molotov points out that in retrospect, if the Soviet Union during Lenin’s time worked towards “peaceful coexistence,” they believed that “the imperialists would have given us no kind of peace.”⁷⁶ This rationality carried over into the Cold War when coexistence was exactly the mentality necessary to prevent nuclear war. Yet the Soviets had significant reason for trusting this mentality. As Stalin argued within his Bolshoi Theater speech, the West failed to understand the resiliency of the Soviet Union.⁷⁷ The end of the war meant that Communist thinking was now

⁷³ Joseph Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, trans. A. Fineberg, 2nd ed. (Foreign Language Publishing House, 1953), accessed March 11, 2022, <http://archive.org/details/economicproblemsocialismussrstalin./>, 63.

⁷⁴ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 206.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 203.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 388.

⁷⁷ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 6.

more justified in their own eyes than ever before. The diplomatic aggressiveness exhibited by the Soviet Union appeared as a logical and appropriate reaction to protect their interests.

The Soviet government throughout the postwar period followed a policy of military preparations. These preparations combined Marxist-Leninist beliefs about the next war. Historian William Odom argued that the Soviet military based their plans on the assumption that they would have to take on the entire capitalist world in the next war. This required a military “many times larger than a realistic assessment of the actual military threats.”⁷⁸ While this may seem contradictory to the consensus of a divided West, Novikov explained there was a possibility “of an Anglo-American military alliance in order to establish joint world domination” at least temporarily.⁷⁹ Regardless of whether such an alliance was the case, the country kept expanding its already labyrinthine military-industrial complex and would pour resources into military expenditures. This was on top of both the pre-war Five-Year Plans and the devastation of the war. Historian Mark Harrison explains that there are multiple figures for calculating the Soviet defense budget as a percentage of national GDP. But most of the calculations of early postwar military spending seem to keep pace with the prewar military expansion from 1940. As a peaceful baseline, figures in 1928 and 1937 were 2% and 6% respectively. Soviet preparations for the war peaked at 17% in 1940 and postwar spending only dropped to 10% by 1950. The Soviets were certainly not spending 60% like in 1942, but they remained at least militarily

⁷⁸ William E. Odom, *The Collapse of the Soviet Military* (Yale University Press, 1998), accessed September 4, 2020, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt32bpdm.>, 13.

⁷⁹ Novikov, “Telegram from Nikolai Novikov,” 8.

prepared for any contingencies compared to 1928 to 1937.⁸⁰ This speculation matches political attitudes in preventing an immediate war with the West while equally embarking upon long term preparations for it. Yet beyond immediate military spending, there were other aspects of militarization beyond the military itself.

It is important to keep in mind that one of the main aims of Soviet demilitarization after the war was to rebuild Soviet heavy industry to defend the country. The military secretly demobilized as many troops as possible to reinforce the labor pool for this industrial recovery.⁸¹ The strange military to military-industrial pipeline's purposes were clear to its laborers and Soviet leadership. The language of progress reports from these industrialization campaigns used military terminology like "mobilization," "shock troops," and "ambushes" to describe the otherwise ordinary process of industrial buildup.⁸² At the same time, the United States was demilitarizing through this period, although that concept completely passed over Novikov's head. The reality was that the United States spent so little on military affairs prior to the war.⁸³ Thus, in comparison to the postwar responsibilities of occupation in places as far flung as Germany and Japan, the minimum budget was inherently going to be larger. Novikov even mistakenly accuses that the United States was creating its first peacetime draft in history.⁸⁴ The first peacetime draft occurred in 1940, long before the Soviet Union even entered American

⁸⁰ Mark Harrison, "Soviet Industry and the Red Army under Stalin: A Military-Industrial Complex?," *Cahiers du Monde russe* 44, no. 2/3 (2003), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20174777>., 329.

⁸¹ Fitzpatrick, "War and Society in Soviet Context," 45.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁸³ Harrison, "Soviet Industry and the Red Army under Stalin," 329.

⁸⁴ Novikov, "Telegram from Nikolai Novikov," 4.

military consideration. Military occupation did play a role within postwar Soviet militarization as well. Soviet occupation forces played a key role in ensuring Soviet bloc countries remained compliant with both socialism and reparation payments.⁸⁵

Molotov points out succinctly that “Stalin looked at it this way: World War I has wrested one country from capitalist slavery; World War II has created a socialist system; and the third will finish of imperialism forever.”⁸⁶ On one hand, the country triumphed over Nazi Germany and resolved itself of any immediate external threats. On the other hand, Stalin and his associates had many reasons to fear the risk of future threats to Soviet security. The country entered the postwar world ready to expand upon this new “socialist system” and prepare for the next war. To achieve this, the government followed an eclectic mix of ideological, military, and imperial concerns in their diplomacy. These ideas could easily align with each other while contradicting each other at the same time. There were often alternatives and signs that this did not have to be the only course of action. However, Soviet goals only reinforced themselves to a point where it was difficult to consider or attempt alternative options. These goals would come to affect the Soviet people in a variety of ways. Domestic society prepared itself militarily, industrially, and ideologically while both taking and supplying resources to its new imperial subjects. The Soviet Union therefore committing itself to a course of action that rejected international cooperation outside its bloc and prevented real recovery at home. Stalin’s argument for the future was state

⁸⁵ Matthew A. Evangelista, “Stalin’s Postwar Army Reappraised,” *International Security* 7, no. 3 (1982): 126-7.

⁸⁶ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 63.

policy, but there was no comment on whether socialism would live through an experience in which “the living would envy the dead,” as Khrushchev may have later stated.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Library of Congress, *Respectfully Quoted: A Dictionary of Quotations*, ed. Suzy Platt (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993), 239.

CHAPTER 3. DOMESTIC ISSUES

The Hope for Peace, The Need for Recovery, & The Political Reality

The Soviet entanglement abroad occurred at a time when there was a significant upswell of support for various reforms and changes to domestic policies. The breakneck pace of Soviet policies and the impact of the Second World War contributed to an increasing attitude for recovery. The experiences of veterans at times united them around postwar societal problems. Everyday citizens heard optimistic promises from their leadership and dealt with continuously terrible living conditions. National leadership was aware of these problems and increasingly considered if there were alternative courses of actions. At the same time, oppressive Soviet policies abroad conflicted with these desires. Official propaganda managed to redirect some pressure against the West. The government increasingly believed that international issues could solve long-term internal ones at the cost of any immediate postwar reform. Attitudes for reform became suppressed through a variety of societal pressures stemming from ideological, military, and imperial issues that prevented the coalescence of any political force for change.

The pride after the Great Patriotic War was emblematic of both the problems and complaints that would arise from Soviet policies. Stalin's Bolshoi Theater speech made it clear that the war was the test of the Soviet system. Henceforth, its actions were more legitimate than under the experimental days of Lenin. He did recognize that the war legitimized the struggle for survival of everyday Soviet citizens. Their survival through collectivization and the Five-Year Plans all culminated in their survival over fascism. This was the reward of their efforts. More of these policies would be necessary to rebuild the nation and defend from a foreign opponent. "Only when we succeed in doing that can we be sure that our Motherland will be insured against all contingencies," Stalin concluded. Of course, Stalin was not so bold as to claim that the war

insulated him from all criticisms. His speech was technically a speech to Soviet voters. He then said that “Victors may and should be judged... I regard the election campaign as the voters' judgment the Communist Party.”⁸⁸ Stalin and his associates remained in power and the people remained publicly supportive of the totalitarian state. Yet there was widespread dissatisfaction with the course of postwar policies within the country. Collectivization, the Five-Year Plans, and the war led to widespread problems for everyday people. “I have no husband and I have no bread: I will neither go to the meeting nor will I vote,” one woman complained. The sentiment was emblematic of the widespread dissatisfaction of many with their negligible role within the political process.⁸⁹ In the postwar era, Soviet legitimacy would stem from the lessons of war. Private criticism of Soviet policies would also originate within their own lessons of the war.

The government did acknowledge the consequences and devastation of the war, but the political lessons from this were complex. *Happiness*, for example, includes numerous references to the war-torn state of the Soviet Union. Voropayev intends to live in a war-torn Crimean town and recuperate from his extensive war injuries. The town is in bad shape with the lingering smell of burnt wood hanging in the air. The settlers arriving in the area are disorganized and there seems to be no life, not even barking dogs. Voropayev's conclusion from the directionless workers lingering around was not with those in charge, of course. “‘Like when our unit was surrounded,’ was the thought that flashed through Voropayev's mind. ‘No order. No

⁸⁸ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 14.

⁸⁹ Nicholas Ganson, “Famine of Victors: The Soviet Hunger of 1946–1947 in Historical and Global Perspective,” *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses* (Ph.D., The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2006), <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/famine-victors-soviet-hunger-1946-1947-historical/docview/305281528/se-2?accountid=10771>. 134.

discipline.”⁹⁰ The conclusion from this comment would be that a disciplined workforce would be productive and restore normality to the village. His understanding reveals the blame for these matters lied with the individual people and their attitudes. His arguments about encirclement within the context of the war are even more startling. A lack of discipline in the early years of the war may have contributed to some defeats of the floundering Red Army. However, his conclusion that order and discipline alone could have prevented an encirclement shows just how domestic propaganda directed criticism down upon the lower rungs of Soviet society instead of its leadership.

The victory also led many people to stand in opposition of the collective farms for a variety of reasons. Some simply believed that this was the end of collectivization and heavy industrialization since the outside threat ended. One collective farm worker said that “My husband Aleksei fought for nothing in the war. He thought that, after the war, the collective farms would be disbanded, but that didn't work out.”⁹¹ This sentiment reflected the sacrifices of veterans and the lack of a payoff in postwar society. Many veterans and individuals who fought or traveled through Central Europe understood that non-collectivized farms were more prosperous, for example. “Look— in the western regions [which were incorporated into the USSR in 1939] there are no collective farms and life is better,” one peasant argued.⁹² The story of comrade colonel Voropayev merrily transforming a Crimean collective farm into a successful enterprise through socialist gumption contrasted with the hopeless reality of postwar Soviet life.

⁹⁰ Pavlenko, *Happiness*, 30, 33-4. Voropayev assumes that the dogs have fled. It is my own speculation that the starving settlers would have eaten any wandering dogs before they had the chance.

⁹¹ Ganson, “Famine of Victors,” 139.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 135.

Fedor Abramov wrote a novel, *Two Winters and Three Summers*, which talked about the experiences of those on a collective farm. The character Il'ia, a collective farmer, looked over the well-leafed list of obligations he had as a tax. "Sheep's milk cheese—raw. Blank. Not heard of in Pekashino [the collective farm]. Milk. Of standard richness... Il'ia smiled here each time. He smiled now. Il'ia had no cows." The chairman had promised cows for Il'ia to raise, but problems with the farm's management prevented this. He "didn't read further. However crafty you are, however much you deceive yourself, whether you read from the end or the middle, it makes no difference. You come to the meat." Il'ia then admired the bigger picture of the situation: "why is it city people can't do without meat? But we can. Just ask me—when did our children last eat meat?"⁹³ Il'ia's final comment reveals a rural-urban divide. The collective farms were essential in supplying food to the industrial plans occurring in the city. The government prioritized this industrial development over the well-being of the rural populace.

Mass famine was another aspect of society that the people endured through the postwar era. According to economist Michael Ellman, the 1947 famine occurred from a combination of a drought, confiscation of grain, exports, the exclusion of some peasants from rationing, and issues with the rationing system.⁹⁴ The rationing alone demonstrated Soviet priorities. Decree No. 380 denied bread to the unemployed, some dependents, and reduced bread allotments for the countryside by 70%. The decrease in rations to the countryside combined with grain appropriations was effectively a death sentence for those affected. Between 1.5 and 2 million

⁹³ Fedor Abramov, "The Famine Years," *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History*, 1984, accessed March 10, 2022, <http://soviethistory.msu.edu/1947-2/famine-of-1946-1947/famine-of-1946-1947-texts/the-famine-years/>.

⁹⁴ Michael Ellman, "The 1947 Soviet Famine and the Entitlement Approach to Famines," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24, no. 5 (2000): 618.

people dying that winter. Ganson compares these figures with the Tsarist 1892 famine and finds that “the increase in the death rate in 1947 in the USSR, including non-famine areas, was nearly three times greater than the corresponding figure for the regions affected by famine in 1892: 2.85 versus 1.05.”⁹⁵ It could also be opaque in its implementation. In a meeting on the situation, a manager erroneously informed the public that “entire rural population was being taken off of rationing.” Bread rations could take on a political angle as well as “teachers, medical providers, and other workers” who were to receive bread did not for unknown reasons. The same manager alluded to the Great Purges to get people to stop complaining to him about the situation. Even in the metropole that was Moscow, forty bread stores closed and Muscovites mobbed the remaining stores for bread. The blame placed on the unemployed and unimportant people for using up the food was a significant factor in the famine. Ganson summarizes that “The workers, having sinned against the government, could also be held accountable. Meanwhile, the authors of the decree remained beyond judgment.”⁹⁶ When people resorted to eating acorns or outright cannibalism, the source of their hunger officially became isolated from the immediate problem. Officials warned people that acorns could cause illnesses and arrested or institutionalized cannibals. The confiscation and deprivation of grain did not officially factor into these matters.⁹⁷

The position of the Soviet government in all these matters was complex on both a domestic and international level. Certainly, the urban industrial divide played a key role in the allotment of food. But the government would have considered the collective farms to be of the utmost importance to both socialism and the Soviet state’s production. In fact, Stalin’s Bolshoi Theater

⁹⁵ Ganson, “Famine of Victors,” 102, 205.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 106-7.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 153.

speech lauded the accomplishments of the collective farms as equal to that of the Five-Year Plans.⁹⁸ Molotov later framed negative criticisms of the harsh nature of national policies within the mindset of leadership. He argued that “in bourgeois democracies they don’t do what needs to be done.”⁹⁹ In comparison, the state would go to extreme measures to carry out what they thought was right. Based on Soviet propaganda, it seemed that convincing the people of the legitimacy and promise of these actions was more important than actual societal improvements. Molotov even recalls that the original collectivization and taxation efforts consisted of squeezing out “every ruble and kopek” from the peasants to fund the revival of industry.¹⁰⁰ Upon being asked about the low wages of Soviet workers, Molotov argued that it was a complex problem. But ultimately, he explained that “As long as imperialism exists it will be very difficult for people to improve their lives. Defense capability and much else are needed.”¹⁰¹ The Soviets would have also considered ideology and production to be under threat if they traded or received grain from the West. Djilas criticized how “Those who govern [in the Soviet Union] are still themselves too poor to find dogmatism and monopoly rule a hinderance or superfluous, while the Soviet economy can still exist enclosed in its own empire and can absorb the losses caused by its separation from the world market.”¹⁰² Molotov also recalled that “We never resorted to

⁹⁸ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 11-2.

⁹⁹ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 272.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 169.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁰² Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 189.

purchasing food from abroad...we needed equipment and metals in the event of war...That consideration came first.”¹⁰³

There were alternative options that some within the government considered. The Soviets would have traded with their socialist neighbors if possible. But the postwar situation in these countries made importing grain a non-starter on top of the industrial and financial reparations. This equally made it difficult to halt the exportation of grain since it would hinder the progress of socialism. Molotov bitterly remarked that “after the war the Czechs used to take bread from us and feed it to their livestock. And we were starving.”¹⁰⁴ At the same time, there were voices from many officials that easing the collection of grain would give long term benefits. Mikoyan and even Molotov favored such a policy at times.¹⁰⁵ But the most principal factor of all would have been postwar ideological pride. Stalin’s speech reflects that the original collectivization campaign faced significant opposition. “But the Party yielded neither to the threats of some nor to the howling of others and confidently marched forward in spite of everything,” he recalled.¹⁰⁶ The lesson was that by following the party line, the Soviet Union would be successful despite short-term difficulties. Propaganda would be necessary to show the Soviet people that this was the right course of action. Ellman makes it clear that unlike the 1930s, the 1947 famine’s primary cause was environmental. But “had the policies of the government with respect to taxes and procurements, stocks and international trade, been different from what they actually were, there

¹⁰³ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 359.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁰⁵ Ganson, “Famine of Victors,” 192.

¹⁰⁶ Stalin, “Speech Delivered by Stalin,” 12.

might have been no famine, or only a much smaller one, despite the drought.”¹⁰⁷ Yet after decades of starvation in the Soviet Union, the problem seems to have been received with deaf ears. But cracks were showing within the totalitarian Stalinist system. The impact of the war created a vast change within the psyche of veterans and civilians. Why couldn't the Soviet government experience changes in their attitude as well?

A significant amount of Soviet propaganda during the era tried to frame everyday attention to the real source of postwar issues: the West. While it is easy to accuse such messages of simply diverting attention from famines and failed diplomatic exploits, the propaganda did properly characterize the political dilemma of the country. The government worked off the Marxist-Leninist belief that domestic prioritization was not possible until capitalism and class differences disappeared. The surprise attack on the Soviet Union easily created seeds of mistrust among the everyday people of capitalist intentions. Soviet propaganda simply needed to shift this common mistrust onto the formerly anti-fascist West and change the Soviet identity of the war. Many forms of media were contemporary pieces comparing the Soviet and American sides of the war. *The Meeting on the Elbe* (1947 play, 1949 movie) portrayed American soldiers as immature, undisciplined, cultural degenerates who relied upon aggressiveness. This heavily contrasted with battle hardened and disciplined Soviet troops. One early scene in which a Soviet soldier first sees the Americans at the river Elbe sums up the pessimistic message of the film. The soldier says, “Look, it is the last day of war—and finally we have a second front” against Germany. This perspective of the famous meeting of Soviet and American troops contrasts with the positive attitudes that occurred at the actual event. Historian Rósa Magnúsdóttir argues that this party line

¹⁰⁷ Ellman, “The 1947 Soviet Famine,” 623.

whiplash may have been difficult to accept for Soviet viewers. The “memory of the war itself and the suffering of the Soviet population” were likely the main factors in acceptance of a supposed American betrayal. Propaganda was rapidly reforming the meaning of the war in the face of deteriorating Soviet-American relations.¹⁰⁸

Another area of analysis these works adopted was theme of regular Americans versus capitalists and reactionaries. The play, *The Voice of America* (1949), follows the story of a decorated American soldier who returns from the war to face the House Committee on Un-American Activities. The film derives its name from the eponymous postwar radio station that broadcasted pro-American messages across the new Soviet bloc. Many of the films characters from senators to police officers are a stand in for the “fascist stratum” of America. Ironically, veterans returned to the Soviet Union to experience their own form of trial in the face of oppressive economic and political policies. Interestingly, these films try to bridge the divide between wartime pro-Western messages and postwar anti-Western ones. *The Russian Question* (1946 play 1948 movie) follows a journalist fighting the capitalist “Wall Street” oppression of everyday people. The main character nevertheless extolls the vision of the “America of Abraham Lincoln, in the America of Franklin Roosevelt.”¹⁰⁹ These kinds of media gained remarkable success but walked a tightrope between the evolving party line or accusations of praising America. Both the movie versions of *The Meeting on the Elbe* and *The Russian Question* later faced criticisms for their dated anti-American messages compared to more recently written works. *The Voice of America* play faced the worst of this backlash when it used American

¹⁰⁸ Rósa Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One: The United States of America in Soviet Ideology and Propaganda, 1945-1959*. (Oxford University Press, 2022), 21-2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-5.

magazines showing a better life as props. Criticism quickly grew to question the non-working-class nature of the main character. Playwright Boris Lavrenev then personally wrote to Stalin to try to convince him of the film's suitability for Soviet audiences. For the country, anti-American propaganda could not risk showing the disparity between postwar American and Soviet society.¹¹⁰

This kind of propaganda also played a key role within the complex struggle for peace movement occurring at the time. The struggle for peace was a public face of the Marxist-Leninist understanding that the West was inherently militaristic. One rather insensitive resolution of the Central Committee explained that "It is necessary to explain that the Soviet peace-loving foreign policy relies on the might of the Soviet state and, that reinforcing its might with their creative labor, Soviet people are strengthening the security of the people."¹¹¹ The suffering of those in collective farms or heavy industry directly connected with the vitality of national security. The result of a world war instigated by capitalist powers "can lead only to the collapse of the capitalist system and its replacement by the socialist system." Given that the Soviet Union wanted a socialist world, there was quite the conflict of interest over their desire for peace. The *Meeting on the Elbe*'s characterization of American soldiers as aggressive compared to their Soviet counterparts would give viewers an understanding of the inevitability of such a war. This was not a challenging task to achieve when the Soviet people had just faced a surprise attack on their nation several years earlier. The people quickly fell under a war scare of whether they could come under attack by the United States. The deceptiveness of Soviet propaganda in creating this

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 21-3, 27.

¹¹¹ Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee (CPSU CC), "Resolution of the Central Committee," 2.

fiction did cause questions about why America would engage in such a senseless fight so soon after the last war. Those sentiments became irrelevant through the rallying of the people around jingoist patriotism to rebuild the country.¹¹² This spirit was not as successful in masking the immediate hardship everyday Soviet people faced at the same time.

The needs of veterans in the postwar Soviet Union were complex yet surprisingly cohesive at times. State sanctioned media reflected the power of this unified group within Soviet society. Author and journalist Pyotr Pavlenko's novel *Happiness* includes numerous statements about a veteran's problems within the postwar Soviet Union. In one section, the main character, Voropayev, rallies veterans at a collective farm asking, "Did we fight at the front only to perish at home?"¹¹³ He then uses the experiences of the various veterans listening to his speech to win their support. Shortly after, he coerces a veteran who did not serve on the frontlines. The veteran attempts weakly argue that "his conscience was clear" on his war service, but Voropayev despised "this retired bureaucrat, whose whole character ran against the Soviet grain."¹¹⁴ Voropayev's use of the experiences of veterans and his attitudes for bureaucratic authority were easily relatable for Soviet veterans after the war. The authorities encouraged these traits in invigorating the Soviet people and deriding cosmopolitanism. The idea of soldiers behind the frontlines engaged in bureaucracy was not an unusual idea in the postwar Soviet Union. The depiction of Stalin in the novel even says "Unfortunately, we still have a lot of people who prefer to remain officials in Moscow rather than be leaders in the provinces...but their time will end

¹¹² Magnúsdóttir, *Enemy Number One*, 48.

¹¹³ Pavlenko, *Happiness*, 109.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 120-1.

soon” he says ominously.¹¹⁵ Paradoxically, these attitudes would serve veterans well in their attempts to reform Soviet politics against local officials.

There was a real connection veterans gained between their own identities and the wider world through the war. The nation fought a unique fight against fascism for four years and suffered through immense sacrifices. This resulted in a strong, yet exploitable draw of the nature of the war on a more global scale. Officially, the Soviet Union recognized the important service veterans gave their country yet treated them no differently than any other group. Marxist polemics dictated that if the status of veterans strayed too far from non-veterans, the country would effectively place them in a new social class. Western veterans organizations were lobbying to resist the Soviet Union, so the concept of independently organized veterans became reactionary. Thus, attention to veterans was meant to be little different from what any other person in the country received. The government did acquiesce to the creation of the Soviet Committee of War Veterans (1956) to synergize with official propaganda that veterans and non-veterans all enjoyed a better way of life within the Soviet Union. This “Potemkin organization” would stand for Soviet interests for international veterans movements and organizations. In the process, it would bolster the military and ideological prestige of the Soviet system. Veterans did not see the organization in the official manner, however. Individuals who participated in the organization began attempting to use it as a mouthpiece for domestic problems.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 349-50.

¹¹⁶ Mark Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War: A Popular Movement in an Authoritarian Society 1941-1991* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008). 156, 164.

These voices for the support of veteran concerns quickly got to the point where leadership within the organization needed to constantly harp on their official mission of state propaganda. One veteran asked of the senior political leadership: “Where do these candidates come from, who nominates them? We don’t need either generals nor [sic] colonels. We met here mainly with questions about our transportation—wheelchairs. An organizer responded that “You have to understand the goals and tasks of our organization. Our basic task is public work in defense of peace.”¹¹⁷ This defense of peace was identical to the common struggle for peace narrative that the Central Committee had been pushing in propaganda and over the heads of individual Soviets.¹¹⁸ While this united the Soviet people to oppose the aggressive West, it may have done little to modify their negative perception of the state of their own country. Thus, Soviet veterans would surprisingly continue ignoring the stated purpose of the organization. These individuals united around their shared experiences and what they perceived as unfair treatment for their service in the war. Another functionary frustratingly complained that “I have already explained our statutes on two presidium meetings, and now I will say it for the third time...It is very important for our fight for peace that we work among the several tens of thousands of people who are organized in the two international organizations of veterans.”¹¹⁹

Everyday civilians also had their own forms of protest and resistance of the party line. The most extreme example of this resistance used outright violence and opposition to oppose Soviet rule. In the Ukrainian SSR, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) maintained an independence

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 165-6.

¹¹⁸ Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee (CPSU CC), “Resolution of the Central Committee,” 2.

¹¹⁹ Edele, *Soviet Veterans of the Second World War*, 171.

movement against the Soviet government through the late Stalinist period. Most of their activities thus consisted of more nationalist orientated anti-Soviet activities but they also helped to spread information on flaws within Soviet policies and propaganda. Documents spread by the UPA include official Soviet policies towards confiscating food from collective farms. Other documents spread information on those sent to the gulags and the accusations against them. A pamphlet titled “Guidelines for Parents in Educating Children” showed their disgust with Soviet policies and propagate the importance of informing even children of these matters. The pamphlet warned parents to instruct their children “what damage and crimes the Bolsheviks are perpetrating against the Ukrainian nation.” The cost of these activities under the late Stalinist Soviet Union were obviously quite harsh. Officials would even go as far as to burn dairy farm cooperatives to the ground just to deny the UPA of the sealable milk jugs they would use as document caches for these pamphlets.¹²⁰

Most Soviet citizens would have found it difficult to bear the price of this level of anti-Soviet resistance and thus resorted to more passive measures. In the context of domestic policy changes, the Soviet people rarely targeted senior leadership as responsible for social and economic problems. This stemmed from a combined reality of propaganda from above and reality below affecting the everyday perception of events. Propaganda lauded the “peace-loving” nature of the government and its struggles in advancing socialism for the people. At the same time, the people faced the negative taxation and repressive state policies from local bureaucracy. Historian

¹²⁰ Halyna Tereshchuk, “Old UPA Docs Reveal Revolutionary Activities in Soviet Ukraine in 1950s,” trans. Christine Chraibi, *Euromaidan Press*, last modified August 15, 2017, accessed March 10, 2022, <https://euromaidanpress.com/2017/08/15/old-upa-docs-reveal-revolutionary-activities-in-soviet-ukraine-in-1950s/>.
148.

Nicholas Ganson summarizes the peasant response to the 1947 famine: “The implication was obvious: local representatives of state power, *and not the Soviet leadership*, were responsible for the poverty of the peasantry.” Oddly, upper Soviet leadership also blamed local officials for the famine. Local officials took the blame for pilfering cattle, grain, and money from the collective farms. There was certainly some truth to this corruption, but these accusations ignored the source of the issue from above.¹²¹

An anecdote from Djilas about his chauffeur in Moscow may explain the opinions of many Soviets in the context of international issues. The man in question, Panov, “found it impossible to believe that there were more cars in New York and Paris, although he did not hide his dissatisfaction with the quality of new Soviet cars.”¹²² This was the duality of the average Soviet person: steeped in the socialist propaganda against the West and passively critical of the problems within their own country. For an everyday person, believing both would have created a rather bleak world. Soviet ideology emphasized a vision of the future might have well been comparable to promises of fusion power just down the road in 20 years every 20 years. At the same time, the outside world was a reactionary, capitalist dystopia. What was a Soviet citizen to believe in outside of their own struggle to survive? This did not mean that people were entirely unaware of the wider issues either. Perhaps some realized that localized and passive resistance was far safer. One banned ditty or *chastushka* at a collective farm went:

Part of the wheat—abroad

All of the potatoes— for vodka

¹²¹ Ganson, “Famine of Victors,” 150-1.

¹²² Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, 165.

And to the hungry farmers they say:

Go to the movies.¹²³

The ditty offers three criticisms of Soviet policies during the 1947 famine. First, it criticizes the exportation of wheat to the greater Soviet bloc during the famine. The quantity of wheat exported was small, but at a time of starvation, it appears the common people both knew and disapproved of it. Second, the potatoes to vodka line could reference the mixed Stalinist-Leninist line towards alcohol. Originally, state vodka was a Tsarist tax on an addicted peasantry. The Soviets stopped this practice, then reinstated it around 1925 after they needed the revenue.¹²⁴ There was a clear conflict of interest of continuing the vodka monopoly for revenue while people starved. Third, the movie reference easily alludes to the propaganda occurring at the time. Given the Soviet mission in educating the populace of the ideological, military, and imperial goals of Soviet policies, this was an insult to those who endured the consequences of those policies.

Magnúsdóttir concludes that the countless letters and passive resistance of Soviet citizens did not result in any real changes on the part of Soviet leadership or propaganda. This was even though the Central Committee regularly collected *svodki* (“moods of the population”) reports. Rather, the reports showed the importance of “popular introduction and mobilization” of the Soviet people was important, not private grumblings.¹²⁵ The effectiveness of books like *Happiness* and films like *The Russian Question* were important to Soviet leadership. These kinds of popular media would coalesce the Soviet people around the ideological, military, and imperial

¹²³ Ganson, “Famine of Victors,” 139.

¹²⁴ Anna L. Bailey, *Politics Under the Influence* (Cornell University Press, 2018), accessed March 10, 2022, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt21h4vnm>. 10, 13-4.

¹²⁵ Ganson, “Famine of Victors,” 47.

issues of the political leadership. The Soviet people were ultimately to bear both the consequences of this burden and endorse its reasoning.

The demanding situation everyday people found themselves in within the postwar Soviet Union made them entertain the idea of reform or at least reducing the worst of Stalinist policies. Propaganda and political suppression prevented any tangible results from these sentiments. At the core of Soviet opposition to these changes was its ideological, military, and imperial obsession. Stalin once said that “peace will be preserved and strengthened if the peoples take the cause of peace into their own hands and uphold it to the end.” The public Soviet mindset revolved around this conviction that the nation peacefully stood opposed to warmongering capitalism. Yet as the passive resistance of everyday individuals showed, the people played little role in how the state decided to pursue this. The Soviet Union had endured decades of these sacrifices, and this was no different. Someone asked Molotov in 1971 why he said that imperialism would collapse in the 20th century. He simply responded, “In January 1917 Lenin did not know that in ten months he would become head of government.”¹²⁶ This was the hope that Soviet policy based itself around. Of course, Molotov did not know that in 20 years, the Soviet Union would finally face the contradictions of its hardline obligations.

¹²⁶ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 389, 392.

CHAPTER 4. CONCLUSION

In This Lies the Whole Tragedy

The last group that argued for an alternative vision within the postwar Soviet Union was the leadership itself. The government had their own complex motivations and feelings of how to manage the country. A brief comparison of the late Stalinist era to the Khrushchev years reveals the importance of ideological, military, and imperial issues within the suppression of reform. The 1956 de-Stalinization speech formed one of the most significant changes to Stalinist ideals that influenced Soviet policies prior to Gorbachev. Khrushchev unequivocally denounced the excesses of Stalin's cult of personality and his repression of society.¹²⁷ These ideological changes also intersected with attempted efforts at prioritizing butter over guns within the Khrushchev era. The Soviet military-industrial complex proved to be much more resilient than expected, however. Molotov recalled that Stalin's relationship with the military remained good during his leadership. "Only Khrushchev experienced hostility" from them.¹²⁸ Changes to the imperial rung of Soviet policies began even before 1956. The 1953 agreement between the Soviets and the GDR already pulled back on the worst of the reparation policies. This agreement made it clear that harsh reparations and massive pushes towards socialism would destabilize the Soviet bloc and more subtle efforts would follow. Yet it is within the imperial rung that the limits of Khrushchev's reforms were on full display for the world. The suppression of the revolts in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968) showed that de-Stalinization had strong limits. Khrushchev's replacement with Brezhnev furthered this failure. The roll-back of aspects of de-

¹²⁷ Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 341, 343.

¹²⁸ Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 184, Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 179.

Stalinization after this alluded to how the Soviet Union could not actually escape from the cage of their ideological, military, and imperial mindsets. Brezhnev instead avoided the root causes of international and domestic problems for a “senile cold war.” A détente would exist with the West that would resolve the worst of hostilities and the domestic sphere would equally remain frozen between Stalinism and de-Stalinization.”¹²⁹

Notably, the de-Stalinization speech’s most glaring omission was any rebuke of the international mindset that had gotten the country into so many problems. Khrushchev said that Stalin’s actions protected the working class from “the plotting of the enemies and against the attack of the imperialist camp.” He then contributed his only praise of Stalin that “we cannot say that these were the deeds of a giddy despot,” but rather in “the interests of the victory of socialism...In this lies the whole tragedy!”¹³⁰ This last line was the real tragedy of the Soviet system. His support for the Stalinist line of ideological, military, and imperial understanding of the world meant that it would remain. Prior to Khrushchev’s leadership, there were calls from people like Lavrentiy Beria and Georgy Malenkov for a change of the Stalinist ideological, military, and imperial line. The German question provides an excellent example of these alternatives. Molotov fought with Beria through 1953 over whether the Soviet Union should embrace East Germany, or a neutral united Germany. Although Beria’s attempts to tone back the imperial course within Germany ended with both the revolt and his execution.¹³¹ Malenkov also spoke to East Germans about how a divided Germany would inevitably place the Soviet bloc on

¹²⁹ Vladislav Martinovič Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Fourth pr. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 191; Zubok, *A Failed Empire*, 185.

¹³⁰ Suny, ed., *The Structure of Soviet History*, 349.

¹³¹ Chuev, *Molotov Remembers*, 334-5.

the path to war with the West. He then argued that if the Social Democrats in West Germany rise to power, a compromise over a unified Germany would be possible.¹³² Unlike Stalin's vague commitments, this was easily a far more generous of a statement. He was later heavily rebuked within the Central Committee for making such statements. Khrushchev said that "it was cheap stuff" that placed him in league with anti-Marxist arguments along with Beria. He had a point that it would have caused the East Germans and others to question socialism's viability if the Soviets left. Yet he also argued that Malenkov's accusations that civilization would end in a war on the current course were "goddammed gibberish" that failed to take ideological considerations of the inevitability of socialism in mind.¹³³ Nevertheless, it was one of many missed opportunities that the Soviets could have used to extricate themselves from the complexities of future imperial and military issues with a neutral buffer state.

The postwar Soviet Union remained militarized and failed to reform itself because of its ideological concerns against the West and its new satellite states, all at the cost of the Soviet people. These concerns were more significant than any real postwar recovery that would benefit Soviet society. There was significant clamoring for change among the people at a time of extreme hardship from years of collectivization, industrialization, and war. These ideas remained

¹³² Georgii Maksimilianovich Malenkov, "Speech by Georgii M. Malenkov to a visiting government delegation from the German Democratic Republic (GDR)," trans. Geoffrey Roberts, June 2, 1953, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/112796>. 2-3.

¹³³ Communist Party of the Soviet Union Central Committee (CPSU CC), "Central Committee Plenum of the CPSU Ninth Session, Morning," trans. Zubok, Vladislav, January 31, 1955, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/111995>. 2, 7.

suppressed under international concerns through propaganda and repression. The government was committed towards following through in its commitments no matter the cost.

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VITA

SHAWN CECCONI

Education: M.A. History, East Tennessee State University, Johnson
City, Tennessee, 2022
B.S. History, East Tennessee State University, Johnson
City, Tennessee, 2020
A.S. General Education, Northeast State Community College,
Blountville, Tennessee, 2017
Science Hill High School, Johnson City, Tennessee, 2016

Professional Experience: Graduate Assistant, East Tennessee State University, College of
Arts and Sciences, 2020-2022