Only three or four years ago, historians of the Cold War worked without knowing what was in Soviet archives. They relied heavily on Western records, inferring the motivations and goals of Soviet foreign policy. But the Russians and their former Warsaw Pact allies have begun to open their records for research. The Chinese, too, have opened selected materials, especially ones that illuminate the duplicity and depravity of the men in the Kremlin.

Regime changes and liberalization in many countries have made former officials more reflective and more willing to write about their years in power.

Pondering the archival documents, memoirs, and new assessments, one asks how they might affect debate about the origins and evolution of the Cold War. They reveal a Soviet system as revolting as its worst critics charged long ago. Some scholars go further, asserting that the archives confirm not only the genocidal actions and fundamental brutality of the regime but also its ideological underpinnings and hegemonic aspirations. The highly publicized 1994 television documentary *Messengers from Moscow* resuscitated the old claim that Stalin planned to conquer the globe for Marxism–Leninism, declaring that interviews and documents prove the Soviet leader sent hundreds of agents abroad after 1945 to foment revolution. The historian Steven Merritt Miner cautions readers to be wary of the memoirs and sensitive to the selectivity of the newly released documents, but announces, "Ideology is once again central [to the study of..."
the Soviets’ conduct of the Cold War, after having been played down by scholars for two decades.” John Lewis Gaddis, the leading U.S. expert on the Cold War, maintains that America’s containment policy was indispensable in thwarting the march of the Soviet behemoth, and America itself a beacon of hope to a world menaced by Stalinist totalitarianism. Other scholars share Gaddis’ view that the new evidence affirms the most traditional interpretations of Cold War events.¹

A close reading of the books and articles based on the archival materials suggests more nuanced conclusions. The Cold War was not a simple case of Soviet expansionism and American reaction. Realpolitik held sway in the Kremlin. Ideology played an important role in shaping their perceptions, but Soviet leaders were not focused on promoting worldwide revolution. They were concerned mostly with configurations of power, with protecting their country's immediate periphery, ensuring its security, and preserving their rule. Governing a land devastated by two world wars, they feared a resurgence of German and Japanese strength. They felt threatened by a United States that alone among the combatants emerged from the war wealthier and armed with the atomic bomb. Soviet officials did not have preconceived plans to make Eastern Europe communist, to support the Chinese communists, or to wage war in Korea. Soviet clients, moreover, could and did act in pursuit of their own interests, sometimes goading the Kremlin into involvements it did not want.

Although Soviet actions were more contingent than previously thought, probably nothing the United States could have done would have allayed Soviet suspicions in the early years of the Cold War. Nevertheless, U.S. words and deeds greatly heightened ambient anxieties and subsequently contributed to the arms race and the expansion of the Cold War into the Third World. Rather than congratulate themselves on the Cold War's outcome, Americans must confront the negative as well as the positive consequences of U.S. actions and inquire much more searchingly into the implications of their nation's foreign policies.

A MASTER PLAN?

At the center of the Cold War was the struggle for Germany. Although Soviet military authorities worked with their German comrades to establish a police state in the Soviet-occupied zone, the Kremlin did not have a master plan for Germany. Soviet policies, Norman Naimark concludes after studying documents from East Germany and the Soviet Union, "were often driven by concrete events in the zone, rather than by preconceived plans or ideological imperatives." The Soviets had nothing comparable to Joint Chiefs of Staff memo 1067, the American blueprint for the occupation of Germany. They wanted to gather support for the communist-led Socialist Unity Party through moderate economic policies, coalition-building, and backing for unification. But the need for reparations and for uranium from the mines of southern Saxony, and Red Army troops' looting and mass rape in the zone, undercut Soviet mobilization of support for German communists.

Stalin could not decide whether he wanted a unified Germany run by the German communists, a demilitarized, neutral Germany along the lines of the Weimar Republic, or a sovietized eastern zone amenable to the Kremlin's every whim. His ambivalence was reflected in the contradictory actions in the Russian zone by officials of the Soviet military administration, the secret police, the Foreign

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Ministry, and reparations teams that were seizing factories for relocation to the Soviet Union. Much like Jan Gross, the author of a remarkable book on the Soviet occupation of Poland, Naimark concludes that Soviet officers in eastern Germany “bol-shevizied the zone not because there was a plan to do so, but because that was the only way they knew how to organize society.”

Nor does it appear that Stalin had a definite design for the economies and societies of Eastern Europe. Although he told the Yugoslav communist leader Milovan Djilas that great powers spread their economic system wherever they occupy territory, he stressed to Stanislaw Mikolajczyk, the leader of the Polish Peasant Party, that communism fit Poland like a saddle fit a cow. Historians have not located concrete plans for turning Poland, Hungary, Romania, or other East European states into command economies or communist dictatorships. Stalin may have been chary of acting too quickly, especially when relations with the West were still unclear. When, as late as 1947, Hungarian communists approached Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov about Soviet plans in Hungary, they were unable to ascertain precisely what the Kremlin had in mind.

Some historians believe Stalin subordinated Hungary to Poland, but the new scholarship points up the fluidity even in Poland in the early postwar months and years. Polish Communist Party documents from late 1944 and early 1945 are full of an internal debate over the best strategy for mobilizing support. There was tremendous unrest in the countryside. Soviet troops were still battling the Germans. Polish Home Army units inside Poland and other militantly nationalist groups, some linked to the conservative government-in-exile in London, also fought the Germans but intermittently turned their guns on Polish communists and Red Army forces. The Soviet-installed communist government in Lublin mounted a campaign of arrests, killings, and deportation of opposition members. This operation backfired in late 1944, when some 80,000 armed nationalist partisans roamed the country, killing about 800 Communist Party members and 300 Russian soldiers. The Lublin government then reversed course and sought to establish a coalition with Mikolajczyk, the popular leader of the Peasant Party.

Mikolajczyk was convinced that he had room to maneuver—that Stalin, fed up with his incompetent and unpopular clients, was not wedded to a communist regime in Poland. If he assured Stalin that he would accommodate Soviet security needs, Mikolajczyk thought, the Kremlin might accept his leadership. But after Mikolajczyk and his party mobilized a great deal of political support in the countryside in late 1945 and early 1946, the Polish communists resumed the campaign against their political opponents. During 1947 and 1948 the Peasant Party was crushed and the communists consolidated control of the country.

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The new literature on Poland assigns more agency to the local communists and somewhat less to Stalin, whom it depicts as obsessed with Soviet security and lacking a plan for Poland’s internal configuration. Much the same picture emerges in China, where Stalin initially had no intention of helping the Chinese Communist Party win the civil war and gain power. In *Cold War and Revolution*, the Norwegian historian Odd Arne Westad cites Chinese and Soviet documents to show that Stalin wanted at first to maintain cooperative relations in northeast Asia with the Americans. Stalin hoped to carry this off, Westad says, while at the same time preserving Soviet influence in Manchuria and discouraging a permanent American military presence in China. Subsequently the Soviet leader wavered in his support for Mao Zedong, and the Kremlin retained its links with the Chinese communists’ Nationalist foes. Summing up, Westad sounds like Naimark on Germany: “To the historian—as to his contemporaries, Soviet and foreign—Stalin’s foreign policy is not as much inexplicable in its parts as incoherent in its whole.”

Stalin vacillated on his schemes for particular countries and regions because the Kremlin was hoping to pursue its overall interests based on a policy of realpolitik and cooperation with the United States and Britain but did not know if that approach would work. Vladimir Pechatnov, a diplomat trained as a historian under the Soviet regime, has uncovered three memorandums written in late 1944 and early 1945 by top Foreign Ministry officials Ivan Maisky, Maxim Litvinov, and Andrei Gromyko (who later served as foreign minister for 31 years). All three writers expected a continuation of the wartime alliance—indeed, regarded it as a prerequisite for the protection of Soviet interests in the postwar era. The United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union, they said, could divide the world into spheres of influence. According to Pechatnov, the three officials saw the Soviet sphere “largely in terms of traditional geostrategic dominance and not of Sovietization, which, as all three understood, would hardly be acceptable to the Western allies.”

Pechatnov acknowledges that he has not unearthed evidence that Stalin shared these views, but he believes Stalin did. So do Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, as they write in their important new book *Inside the Kremlin’s Cold War*. Although they claim the Kremlin pursued a “cautious expansionism in those areas that Stalin and his advisers defined as ‘natural’ spheres of influence,” the two young Russian scholars stress that there was “no master plan in the Kremlin, and Stalin’s ambitions had always been severely limited by the terrible devastation of the USSR during World War II and the existence of the American atomic monopoly.”

At the end of the war, Zubok and Pleshakov emphasize, Stalin felt no great need “for an overarching ideology of confrontation.” The Kremlin’s foreign policy

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"was still based on the assumption of realpolitik," a desire to balance the power of the British and Americans and to capitalize on their anticipated rivalries.7

The theme of realpolitik also reverberates through two other excellent books on Stalin's attitudes and actions. David Holloway, a British scholar who teaches at Stanford University, stresses that

the policy Stalin pursued was one of realpolitik. Left-wing critics would later characterize it, correctly, as statist, because it treated states, rather than classes, as the primary actors in international relations, and because it put the interests of the Soviet state above those of international revolution. . . . Stalin wanted to consolidate Soviet territorial gains, establish a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, and have a voice in the political fate of Germany and—if possible—of Japan.8

Realpolitik is a motif in the fascinating work on Stalin's relations with Mao by a troika of scholars, one Russian, one American, and one Chinese. Sergei Goncharov, John Lewis, and Xue Litai write that "when it came to their face-to-face deliberations on particular external policy issues . . . the ultimate concern on both sides was not class struggle, but state interests (though the arguments were sometimes couched in revolutionary terms). In the final analysis, realpolitik governed [Mao's and Stalin's] thinking and strained their relations."9

SECURITY FIRST

Traditionalists see the ideology of world revolution behind the Soviet policies that eventually destroyed the sovereignty of Russia's neighbors. Many of the new writings, however, suggest that the Kremlin's foreign policy was shaped by geopolitical considerations and perceptions of threat, the latter reinforced by Leninist assumptions about the behavior of capitalist nations. The Kremlin wanted to safeguard the Soviet Union against a recrudescence of German power. Like all his contemporaries, Stalin had seen Germany, largely demilitarized and partially occupied after defeat in World War I, rebuild its army and power in less than a generation under the Nazis. Then German armies again attacked, killing some 20 million Soviet soldiers and civilians and almost destroying the Soviet regime. Stalin was determined after World War II to gain control over the East European periphery so that countries like Poland could not serve as a springboard for an offensive against the Soviet Union. He was also intent, the new documents show, on preventing a revival of Japanese power. He told Chinese Nationalist diplomats in July 1945, "Japan will restore her might in 20, 30 years. [The] whole plan of our relations with China is based on this."10

Stalin, the recent literature stresses, wanted to avoid military conflict with the United States. But he sought to prepare

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10Ibid., p. 3.
the Soviet Union to defend itself should the wartime coalition dissolve and fighting break out with the United States. This did not mean, though, that he was planning to attack the West. After scrutinizing records of Stalin’s military thinking, David Holloway concludes, “There is no evidence to show that Stalin intended to invade Western Europe, except in the event of a major war.”

Soviet postwar military plans for 1946 and 1947 were defensive in nature, assuming a Western attack and a Soviet retreat before the launch of a major counteroffensive.

Former First Secretary and Premier Nikita Khrushchev, in reminiscences published during the glasnost years, writes, “In the days leading up to Stalin’s death [in 1953] we believed that we would go to war. Stalin trembled at this prospect. How he quivered! He was afraid of war... Stalin never did anything that might provoke a war with the United States. He knew his weakness.” Although it is difficult to picture Stalin quivering, and although he sometimes talked more boldly to Mao Zedong, most recent writers believe that Khrushchev’s characterization is basically correct: Stalin knew he was operating from a position of weakness, and wanted to avoid war with the United States.

Should a war with the West erupt, however, it was essential that the Soviet Union protect its flanks. Defense in depth reinforced the Soviet desire to retain former czarist lands lost in the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5) and World War I that had been seized during World War II. With its armies spread across most of Eastern and Central Europe as a result of the horrendously costly battle against the Nazis, and its troops ensconced in Manchuria and northern Korea as a result of the last-minute declaration of war against Japan, Moscow was well-positioned to achieve its longtime aim of control of the periphery. In his account of the rivalry between the Soviet Union and the United States in China in 1945-46, Odd Arne Westad illustrates how security concerns shaped Stalin’s inconsistent actions. Kathryn Weathersby uses Russian Foreign Ministry documents to demonstrate the primarily defensive orientation of Soviet policy in the Korean Peninsula in the late 1940s.

If security and geopolitics are important themes in the new literature on the Stalinist era, they are even more salient for understanding the foreign policies of the dictator’s successors. With the exception of Molotov, the top contenders in the struggle for power after Stalin’s death—Khrushchev, Georgi M. Malenkov, and Lavrenti P. Beria—all believed that a relaxation of tensions with the West was critical for the communist regime, which they thought might collapse without Stalin. To the surprise of many scholars, the documents show Beria—the sinister, brutal head of the secret police—proposing that the Kremlin offer the West a deal

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11Holloway, p. 271.
on the unification and neutralization of Germany. Beria was willing to sacrifice the East German communist regime to reduce East-West tensions, help ensure an orderly transition in the Kremlin, and allow for some reallocation of resources to improve the Soviet economy. But the other three contenders, fearing the secret police chief and a reunited Germany seeking to recover territory and influence lost in World War II, arranged for Beria’s arrest and execution.

During the middle and late 1950s Khrushchev fretted over the stability of the East German regime, worried about the recrudescence of militarism in West Germany, and scorned the American determination to bargain from a position of strength. Khrushchev was confident of the superiority of socialism and its eventual triumph through peaceful competition, but to counter the U.S. negotiating style he felt he had to build strength of his own. The Kremlin, Khrushchev believed, would never gain the respect and security to which it was entitled unless the Americans were convinced of the Soviet Union’s power.

These attitudes contributed greatly to the spiraling arms race with the United States. In their provocative book We All Lost the Cold War, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein use extensive interviews and some new records to analyze the Cuban missile crisis of 1962 and the Middle East crisis of 1973. Khrushchev and Brezhnev, they conclude, felt increasingly threatened as a result of the U.S. strategic buildup of the early 1960s and American assertions of nuclear superiority, “what they considered predatory policies of their adversary, as did American leaders by Soviet expansionist policies.”

Khrushchev deployed missiles to Cuba not only to safeguard the revolutionary regime of Fidel Castro but also to alter the worldwide balance of power, or at least the perceptions of that balance. In his new memoir, Anatoly Dobrynin, the longtime Soviet ambassador to the United States, writes that Khrushchev’s move “was part of a broader geopolitical strategy to achieve parity with the United States that could be used not only in the dispute over Berlin but in negotiations on other issues.”

At a 1994 colloquium with a small group of scholars at the Norwegian Nobel Institute in Oslo, Georgi Kornienko, first vice foreign minister of the Soviet Union in the late 1970s and early 1980s, reflected, “All of our leaders whom I knew from the late 1940s and early ‘50s—all of them feared war and were willing to go to great lengths for peace. . . . Yes, ideology was ideology and pronouncements of their faith in the communist future of the world—everything was there; but there was, as you know by now, no master plan for conquering Europe, for conquering the Third World.” At which point Karen Brutents, former deputy head of the International Department of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, interrupted, saying, “This generation coming from the war—it was a ter-

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15Anatoly Dobrynin, In Confidence: Moscow’s Ambassador to America’s Six Cold War Presidents, New York: Times Books, 1995, p. 73.
rible war—I think they had decided that there would never be a repetition... Any price which is necessary to pay for security will be paid—and finally, it was that price which destroyed the country.” And Kornienko finished, “For security, but not for conquering the world.”

**IDEOLOGY’S PLACE**

The new documents reveal an emphasis on security considerations, but ideology clearly influenced Soviet foreign policy. Stalin was a Bolshevik revolutionary, and he and his successors were imbued with the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Broadly speaking, Soviet leaders believed that economic and class imperatives shaped the policies of capitalist governments, which were assumed to be committed to socialism’s destruction. Colonial lands, they also postulated, would inevitably mount wars of national liberation against their imperialist masters. Rivalries would drive the capitalist states to battle each other, and communism would eventually triumph among the people of the West. These tenets molded Soviet leaders’ understanding of the world, influenced their interpretation of their adversaries’ actions, and heightened their sense of threat.

But these beliefs, powerful yet vague, were subject to manipulation by a Kremlin committed to realpolitik, and in general served to legitimize or justify policy rather than determine it. Stalin used the Comintern, the association of communist parties of the world established by Lenin, and, after 1947, the Cominform, the organization charged with coordinating most European communist parties in the Soviet sphere, to enhance state interests.

Stalin, write Zubok and Pleshakov, “used the common ideology of Communist parties to organize Eastern Europe into a ‘security buffer’ for his state.”

Stalin’s rift with Yugoslav leader Josip Broz Tito in 1948 stemmed in part from the former’s opposition to the encouragement of revolution from below during the final stages of World War II. Moscow also refused to support the Greek left, periodically thwarted Mao’s plans, and generally urged West European communists in 1944 and 1945 to participate in coalition governments, at the time when they were best positioned to win or seize power. Some of these facts have long been known, but they are even more striking in the recent literature. “Ideological declarations,” write Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue Litai, “could serve power politics but not determine it. Motives found deeply rooted in national traditions far outweighed Marxism-Leninism in practice.”

**CLIENTS OF THE KREMLIN**

Traditional histories of the Cold War assume that the Soviet Union tightly controlled its clients and that their actions reflected Soviet desires. But some of the most interesting new information reveals that local communist leaders and, later, Soviet satellites and allies could exert some leverage over the Kremlin and pur-

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17 Zubok and Pleshakov, p. 131.
18 Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue Litai, p. 220.
sue their own interests. Historians are learning that even in the immediate postwar years, relations between the Kremlin and communists in Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and elsewhere were more complicated than they had thought.

After the Nazi defeat, populist parties in Central and Eastern Europe clamored for land reform and improvements in social welfare, which often took precedence in their members’ minds over the development of democracy. Although some issues played to local communists’ advantage, nowhere did they have enough support to win power freely. The communists needed the assistance of Soviet officials, secret police agents, and the organs of military rule in harassing or suppressing their opponents, but their dependence on the Soviets identified them with the random brutal behavior of occupation troops and the demands of reparations teams. Soviet officials, for their part, sometimes tried to restrain their clients’ revolutionary impulses, recognizing that immoderate actions might anger the British and Americans and cause a rift that the Kremlin probably did not wish to occur.

In North Asia, historians once thought Stalin ordered the North Koreans to attack South Korea in June 1950 to test American resolve. But the research in Chinese documents by historians like Shu Guang Zhang and Jian Chen, combined with the opening of Russian archives and the release of some North Korean materials, creates an altogether more complex picture of the beginning of the Korean War. North Korean leader Kim Il Sung was dependent on Moscow and needed Stalin’s authorization before he could send troops south and attempt to reunite the peninsula. But it is now clear that he relentlessly pushed and prodded the reluctant Soviet leader for permission. Once the Chinese communists triumphed in their revolution in 1949, Kim benefited greatly from their support, and their success gained him additional leverage with the Kremlin. Fearing an American response, though, Stalin was loath to gamble on a North Korean attack. He gave his assent and support, Kathryn Weathersby shows, only after becoming convinced that the Americans would not intervene. Moreover, Stalin appears to have calculated that Kim’s quest to unite Korea under communist rule would intensify the rift between the Chinese communists and the Americans.

Similarly, archival research on the goals and tactics of Walter Ulbricht, the

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leader of East Germany, illuminates the period leading up to the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961. Hope Harrison has shown that Ulbricht pressured Khrushchev to help shore up his tottering regime. Ulbricht wanted to halt the flight of hundreds of thousands of the best-educated young East Berliners, gain Western recognition for his government, and annex West Berlin. Khrushchev had different goals—bolstering the East German economy, thereby reducing demands for Soviet aid, and defusing tensions with the West over Germany—but lived in fear that the East German regime would collapse, exposing the Soviet Union’s western flank. Ulbricht thus managed to extract huge quantities of aid and to obtain Khrushchev’s assent to the construction of the wall. In failing to recognize a client’s manipulation of the Kremlin, Harrison writes, “previous analyses of the [Berlin] crisis have missed the key dynamic operating on the Soviet side.”

The issue of agency looms even larger in recent accounts of the latter stages of the Cold War. During the 1970s détente foundered on alleged Soviet adventurism in Africa, especially in the civil war in Angola. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger repeatedly charged the Kremlin with using Cuban surrogates to spread Soviet influence and power to Africa. But new information from archives in Moscow as well as interviews with Soviet officials reveals that the Kremlin was not in control of the situation. In an article in Parameters, a publication of the U.S. Army War College, William DePalo, Jr., places Cuban leader Fidel Castro in the forefront of the effort to assist black liberation movements in Africa. Castro, who believed progressive states had an obligation to aid such movements, began supplying arms and advisers to the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (mpla) as early as 1965. “Soviet policy,” on the other hand, DePalo writes, “clearly revolved around geopolitical considerations, a position which put it increasingly at odds with Cuba.”

Party secretary Leonid Brezhnev at first flatly refused to transport Cuban troops to Angola or to send Soviet officers as advisers, and even the KGB raised doubts about direct intervention. The Kremlin did not know about or authorize the initial deployment to Angola in September 1973; the 2,000 Cuban troops arrived on old passenger aircraft and prerevolutionary cruise ships. It is true that KGB officials like Yuri Andropov (later briefly party general secretary) as well as officials in the party’s International Department were eager to lend support to liberation movements lest Russia lose ground in its rivalries with China and the United States. But they envisioned only limited backing. Only after South Africa invaded Angola in October 1975 to battle the mpla did Moscow assist the Cuban operation.

The story of Soviet involvement in Afghanistan is even more revealing of

the frustrations the Kremlin faced in its dealings with communist leaders whom historians once considered docile Soviet clients. Soviet Foreign Ministry records indicate that the ambassador in Kabul, Aleksandr Mikhailovich Puzanov, was caught by surprise and was by no means enthusiastic when the Afghan Communist Party came to power in an April 1978 coup. Puzanov was well aware of the bitter divisions between the party’s Parcham and Khalq factions, and he considered the latter’s leaders ultra-leftist. The ambassador advised the factions to reconcile and to move forthrightly to mobilize communist support in the countryside.

The Khalq leaders successfully solicited large amounts of aid from Moscow, but they defied Soviet advice, pursuing land policies that engendered widespread unrest and engaging in political fratricide. The Soviets observed developments with growing alarm as they witnessed the disintegration of the shah’s regime in Iran and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. Soviet policy in Afghanistan, Odd Arne Westad concludes, was not shaped by the Cold War rivalry with the United States but by fears of “a regional challenge from militant Islam.” Ultimately the Soviet Union invaded in December 1979 to stabilize an increasingly untenable and frightening situation.

**THREATS AND PHANTOMS**

Although Soviet policy was primarily security-oriented and circumscribed rather than dictated by revolutionary fervor, and though clients led the Kremlin into some involvements rather than the other way around, the West still had ample reason to distrust Stalin and his successors. Stalin’s letters to Molotov show a man consumed by suspicion who considered capitalism an avowed enemy. And while not a big risk-taker, Stalin would exploit adversaries’ perceived weaknesses or hesitation, as in Czechoslovakia in 1948 and in Korea two years later.

But fear of American power in conjunction with ideological assumptions about the behavior of capitalist nations shaped the Soviet mindset and influenced officials’ behavior. In 1946 the ambassador to the United States, Nikolai Novikov, dispatched a memorandum to Moscow that is now often compared to George Kennan’s famous “Long Telegram,” which characterized the Soviet Union as an implacable foe and outlined the need for containment. Novikov’s analysis of American foreign policy dwelled on its expansionist impulses, focused on reactionary factions and imperialist motivations, stressed the U.S. rivalry with Britain over Middle Eastern oil, and urged Moscow to be vigilant in protecting national security. Assuming America’s hostility, neither Novikov nor his successors could grasp the strategic anxieties of capitalist nations like the United States. Arriving in Washington several years later, Dobrynin admits, his mind too “was clogged by the long years of Stalinism, by our own ideological blinders, by our deep-seated beliefs and per-

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ceptions, which led to our misconstruing all American intentions as offensive.”

Most writers would concur with David Holloway’s opinion that the West could never have laid Stalin’s suspicions to rest, yet that does not mean the West bears no responsibility for the course of the Cold War. Dobrynin, after acknowledging his ideological blinders, hastens to add, “Dogma itself was strengthened by the permanent postwar hostility of the United States and its own intransigence toward the Soviet Union.”27 The new research clearly shows that American initiatives intensified Soviet distrust and reinforced Soviet insecurity.

After achieving victory over Germany at a terrible price and gaining a position of unprecedented strength in the middle of Europe, in August 1945 the Russians suddenly faced the reality that the Americans possessed atomic weapons and were willing to employ them. Although he had learned about the Manhattan Project through Soviet espionage, Stalin felt betrayed because Roosevelt and Truman had not leveled with him about the new weapon in their arsenal. Stalin, Holloway writes, believed “that the United States wanted to use the bomb as an instrument of political pressure.”29 U.S. diplomatic intransigence at the Potsdam conference in July 1945, especially on the subject of reparations, seemed to confirm that belief. Gromyko recalls Stalin saying to him during the conference, rather calmly, “Washington and London are hoping we won’t be able to develop the bomb ourselves for some time. And meanwhile, using America’s monopoly . . . they want to force us to accept their plans on questions affecting Europe and the world. Well, that’s not going to happen.”30

Holloway argues that the bomb did not dictate the Kremlin’s adoption of a realist foreign policy; the choice for realism, rather than a revolutionary or liberal orientation, had already been made. But Stalin and Molotov believed that “the United States would use the atomic bomb to intimidate the Soviet Union, to wring concessions from it, in order to impose its own conception of the postwar order. . . . It was crucial, therefore, to show that the Soviet Union was tough, that it could not be frightened.”31

The explosion of a Soviet atomic device in August 1949 did not assuage these feelings of vulnerability; many of the newly opened documents illuminate the Kremlin’s ongoing agitation over the strategic arms race. “The Soviet leadership of the 1960s,” write two former senior arms control negotiators, “learned one thing too well: American superiority in the number of nuclear weapons led to an inequality that threatened Soviet security.”32 From the Kremlin’s perspective, America’s determination to keep the lead forced the Soviet Union to match or sur-

27Dobrynin, p. 24.
28Ibid.
29Holloway, p. 46.
31Holloway, p. 169.
pass U.S. capabilities just to safeguard its own position and reach acceptable compromises in negotiations over the future of Germany, arms limitation, and other matters. Lebow and Stein conclude their account of the Cuban missile crisis by noting that Khrushchev believed superpower relations would actually improve after the Kremlin deployed missiles to the island: “Khrushchev was convinced that the Americans respected power and would moderate their hostility when they were forced to accept the Soviet Union as a military equal.”

Each side, Lebow and Stein emphasize, regarded the other as an opportunistic aggressor, and each, therefore, mistook defensive initiatives for aggressive ones. One can see this misreading in the Soviet reaction to the Marshall Plan. In June 1947 the United States—prompted mainly by fears that dollar shortages in Europe could set back European recovery and ignite political unrest that would benefit communist parties—announced that it would offer economic aid to European nations that agreed to cooperate in a plan for European recovery. For a variety of complicated tactical reasons, all European countries, including Soviet Russia, were invited to participate in the plan so long as they agreed to certain as yet unspecified conditions.

The Marshall Plan was probably the most effective program the United States launched during the entire Cold War. But exciting new research in archives in Russia and Eastern Europe highlights the fears that the plan triggered in Moscow. Mikhail Narinsky, a Russian scholar working at the Moscow-based Institute for Universal History, and Scott Parrish, a political scientist who recently completed his doctoral dissertation at Columbia University, have shown that after initial interest, Molotov and Stalin quickly became convinced that the U.S. aid was designed to lure the Kremlin’s East European neighbors out of its orbit and to rebuild German strength. They viewed the Marshall Plan and accompanying measures to revive industry in western Germany and to create the Federal Republic as fundamental threats to Soviet security. These perceptions prompted the Kremlin to form the Cominform, suppress all dissent in Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria, extinguish the opposition in Hungary, encourage a communist coup in Czechoslovakia, and blockade Berlin. These actions in turn magnified the sense of threat in Washington and London, precipitating the formation of NATO and solidifying the long-term division of Europe. “For Stalin,” say Zubok and Pleshakov, “the Marshall Plan was a watershed.”

**IDEALS AND SELF-INTEREST**

It is now evident that the men in the Kremlin did not know precisely what they wanted to do. Their ideology did not chart a master plan; rather, it distorted their interpretation of other nations’ be-

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31 Lebow and Stein, p. 87.
35 Zubok and Pleshakov, p. 50.
havior and heightened their perception of threat. Because of the pervasive suspicion in the apparat, officials in different agencies rarely spoke to one another, and each bureaucracy pursued its own objectives. Although the regime was brutal and centralized, policy was erratic and contingent.

One empathizes with U.S. officials who had difficulty grasping what was happening inside the Kremlin. Unsurprisingly, they chose to operate on the basis of certain assumptions: totalitarian nations seek unlimited expansion; communists have a master plan. But today the United States and Russia are in a position to inject substantially more complexity and subtlety into their understanding of the Cold War. Americans should reexamine their complacent belief in the wisdom of their country’s Cold War policies. U.S. officials acted prudently in the early years of the Cold War, but their actions increased distrust, exacerbated frictions, and raised the stakes. Subsequently, their relentless pursuit of a policy of strength and counterrevolutionary warfare may have done more harm than good to Russians and the other peoples of the former Soviet Union as well as East Europeans, Koreans, and Vietnamese. Quite a few of the new books and articles suggest that American policies made it difficult for potential reformers inside the Kremlin to gain the high ground. There were times during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s when Stalin’s successors might have liked to stabilize the relationship and curtail the competition with the West, but the perceived threat emanating from the United States held them back.36

As for Stalin, he had no desire to change the totalitarian system he had established before World War II. In fact, the Cold War played into his hands, enabling him to perpetuate the system. But the evidence does not show that Stalin initially thought it would be in the Soviet Union’s interest to have a cold war. Nor did the Soviet leader seek unlimited expansion. Western actions, though prudent, intensified his suspicions. Meanwhile, the presence of Soviet armies in Eastern and Central Europe created a dynamic of its own, fostering the replication of the Soviet totalitarian system in the satellites even in the absence of a grand strategy.

Americans must acknowledge that the U.S. government acted not from moral revulsion against Stalinism but out of fear of Soviet power in the international system. President Truman knew Soviet Russia was a police state, but he liked doing business with Stalin in the beginning. “I can deal with Stalin,” Truman wrote in his diary. “He is honest—but smart as hell.” Basically, he did not care very much what was happening behind the Iron Curtain. “You know,” he jotted in his diary on another occasion, “Americans are funny birds. They are always sticking their heads into somebody’s business which isn’t any of theirs.” Russians, he opined, “evidently like their government


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or they wouldn't die for it. I like ours so let's get along."37 Truman's views changed only when he grew to fear the prospective growth of Soviet power. Truman disliked tyrants and believed in self-government, but not enough to do anything about them unless he saw U.S. interests engaged.

Turning the Cold War into a morality play encourages the ducking of moral dilemmas present and future. What happens when virtue and self-interest do not go hand in hand? Americans and their leaders wind up beleaguered and conflicted when they come up against evil-laden situations, as in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Somalia, that do not pose a threat to vital interests. Americans' sense of rectitude, stoked by victory in the Cold War, encourages them to overlook the extent to which they have tolerated and even aligned themselves with evil regimes when their own interests were not endangered or when it served their interests to do so, thus making life worse for peoples elsewhere. The opening of their enemies' archives should hardly inspire complacency.²

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