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## The Emergence of Stalin's Foreign Policy

### *The Hostile Encirclement*

To understand Stalin as a political thinker, we must see him as a man whose thinking was strongly influenced by perceived parallels between present and past. Unlike other Bolsheviks, he found a parallel between Russia's internal situation in relatively tranquil 1925 and on the eve of the October upheaval of 1917. He thrice stated in party forums during 1925 that the present international situation resembled the prelude of the World War's outbreak in 1914.<sup>1</sup> And having come to think in Russian historical terms, he discerned a parallel between Muscovite Russia's situation in earlier centuries and Soviet Russia's now. In a party speech of 1928, for example, he found a cue for present policy in Peter the Great's attempted revolutionary leap out of Russian backwardness; and in the often quoted speech to managers in 1931 he spoke of the beatings that Russia had suffered in history as punishment for her backwardness and declared that Soviet survival now depended on conquering that backwardness in ten years.<sup>2</sup>

The crux of the third parallel lay in the two Russias' like isolation in an unfriendly international environment. The Bolshevik catch phrase for the isolated condition was "hostile capitalist encirclement." This idea was no invention of Stalin. It was an outgrowth of the Revolution having to fight for life against White forces enjoying the support of numerous intervening foreign states, and of the failure of other anticapitalist revolutions to take place, or to remain in power, in Europe. Stalin, however, made a twofold contribution. First, he had and was able to communicate, more than any other Bolshevik leader, a belief in the encirclement's deadly hostility, a sense of the Revolution's being beset by scheming enemies abroad—linked with its internal enemies—against whom it must incessantly be on guard. Second, he contributed his special perception of the resemblance between the hostile capitalist encirclement and the international isolation of Muscovite Russia in earlier centuries.

What made this perceived parallel so portentous was that as a result past became prologue politically: Stalinism as a politics of internal revolution from above and external aggrandizement rested in large part on this definition of the situation. The isolated Muscovite state had embarked on an ambitious program of ingathering by war and diplomacy the territories that had belonged to Rus' before the Tatar conquest; and its internal state-building policies were geared

1. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, 13 vols. (Moscow, 1946–52), 7:12–13, 28, 280 (hereafter cited as Stalin).

2. *Ibid.*, 11:248–49; 13:38–39.

to that goal. So, now, as Stalin saw it, an internationally isolated Soviet Russian state must bolster its power very rapidly and if need be coercively to prepare for any eventuality. The danger from without necessitated a renewed state-building process within. Much of what was distinctive of Stalinism as a pattern of policy flowed from this postulate. As in Russia's distant past, external policy helped determine internal policy.

The present-past parallel came easily to Stalin's mind because, as a Bolshevik of Great Russian nationalist outlook, he viewed the USSR as the socialist successor-state to historic Russia; it was simultaneously Soviet *and* Russian. In 1934 he expressed his feelings of the Soviet Union's Russianness in a document that dealt with foreign policy. The Central Committee journal *Bol'shevik* was planning a special issue for the twentieth anniversary of the outbreak of the World War, and the editor, Adoratskii, was proposing to reprint in it Friedrich Engels's essay of 1890, "The Foreign Policy of Russian Tsarism." This essay had forecast the war with great prescience on the basis of an acute analysis of the then emerging division of European powers into opposed camps. It had also shown an anti-Russian bias. Engels not only coupled Russia's drive for Constantinople with Germany's annexation of Alsace-Lorraine as forces for war, but he also portrayed Russian foreign policy since Catherine II's time in a cabalistic light—as a never-ending search for world domination through a diplomacy headed by a talented but totally unscrupulous gang of foreign-born adventurers which he called a "new Jesuit order" and a "secret society."

In a confidential letter circulated to his fellow Politburo members on July 19, 1934, Stalin opposed the essay's republication and took to task the second great authority figure of Marxism. Engels had erred in explaining Russia's acquisitive policy more by the presence of the gang of foreign adventurers than by the need for outlet to seas and seaports for enlarged foreign trade and strategic positions. He had portrayed the acquisitive policy as a monopoly of the Russian tsars when it was just as characteristic of other European governments, Napoleon's included. He had omitted the imperialist contest for colonies, German-British contradictions, and Britain's role as a factor in the coming of the war. He had overestimated the importance of Russia's urge toward Constantinople, and exaggerated Russia's role by suggesting that war could be averted by tsarism's overthrow. From such reasoning it would follow that a war by bourgeois Germany against tsarist Russia would be a war of liberation. Indeed, Engels had said in an 1891 letter to Bebel that "if Russia starts a war, forward against the Russians and their allies, whoever they are!" What room did this leave for Lenin's revolutionary defeatism, his policy of transforming the imperialist war into a civil war?<sup>8</sup>

Let Engels's article be published in his collected writings or in a historical journal, said Stalin's letter, but not in the party's fighting organ where its appearance would imply high-level endorsement of its political content. Thus Stalin censored Engels, displaying in the process his sense of being a Russian

3. I. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, ed. Robert H. McNeal, 3 vols. (Stanford, 1967), 1(14):2-10. The letter was first published in *Bol'shevik*, no. 9 (May 1941). For the text of Engels's article, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Russian Menace to Europe*, ed. P. W. Blackstock and B. F. Hoselitz (Glencoe, 1952), pp. 22-55.

leader, his solicitude for Russia's state interests, and his irritation at the anti-Russian tone and thrust of the decades-old essay. In a characteristically subtle way the letter also expressed, as we shall see, the foreign policy that Stalin was pursuing on behalf of Soviet Russia.

*The War Danger*

The inevitability of future wars involving Russia was axiomatic for the Bolshevik leaders. This assumption followed from Lenin's analysis of the contemporary world system in his treatise of 1915–16, *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Advanced capitalism, having now become financier-controlled monopoly capitalism, he argued, had to turn imperialist in order to stave off proletarian revolution at home. The several leading capitalist countries of Europe, as well as the United States and Russia (whose colony was Turkestan), had partitioned much of the rest of the world into colonial dependencies to which they exported surplus capital and from which they derived superprofits. That enabled them to keep their own labor forces employed and in part bribed into quiescence, via the co-opting of venal trade-union leaderships. Because the great hinterland had been all divided up by the close of the nineteenth century, a late-comer in capitalist development like Germany could acquire colonies only by a forcible repartition—hence the imperialist World War and equally inevitable future interimperialist wars for redivision of the colonial spoils.

In the further elaboration of this line of thought after 1917, Leninist theory pictured a world system made inherently unstable by several groups of interlaced "contradictions": those between classes in the capitalist countries; those between capitalist states because of their conflicting imperialist needs; those between particular imperialist states and national-independence movements in their colonies; and, finally, those between the imperialist states as a group and Russia. The Bolshevik Revolution deprived the imperialist system of an important component and exerted a radicalizing effect upon the workers of the West and the colonial peoples of the East. This made the Soviet Republic an object of deadly hostility among the ruling classes of the threatened imperialist order. In such circumstances, an eventual anti-Soviet war was unavoidable.

But the inevitable was not necessarily imminent. Since the immediate post-war chaos of 1919–20, Stalin reported to the Fourteenth Party Congress in December 1925, there had taken place a certain "temporary stabilization of capitalism" along with an equally temporary ebb in the revolutionary tide. What at one time had been viewed as a short breathing spell had turned into "a whole period of breathing spell." Between the world imperialist camp, now under Anglo-American leadership, and the world anti-imperialist camp, headed by Soviet Russia, a certain balance of power and period of peaceful coexistence had set in. In this situation, Soviet policy aimed to expand trade relations with capitalist countries, to work for peace, to pursue rapprochement with countries defeated in the World War, and to strengthen Soviet ties with the colonial countries and dependencies.

At a closed Central Committee plenum in January of 1925, however, he had defined the external situation in more ominous terms as reminiscent of the

period before the outbreak of the World War. The conditions for a new war were ripening, "and a new war cannot but impinge upon us." Because the new war could become an inevitability within a few years, "the question cannot but arise before us of being ready for anything. . . . The question of our army, of its power, of its readiness, necessarily becomes a very live one for us, considering the complications in the countries around us."<sup>4</sup>

International events so developed in 1926 and 1927 as to underscore Stalin's warning about the war danger. In those years Soviet Russia's one diplomatic partner among "bourgeois" governments of Europe was Weimar Germany. With the Rapallo accord of 1922 these two outcasts of the Versailles system had formed a relationship founded on shared adversity and interlocking revisionist goals, particularly with respect to Poland as reconstituted by the victorious Entente powers after the World War. Economic relations were important to them, too, as was the clandestine military cooperation between the Reichswehr, which was given the use of Russian territory for training purposes, and the Red Army, which benefited from German military expertise. In April 1926 the Rapallo agreement was reaffirmed and extended for five years in the Soviet-German Treaty of Berlin, under which the two governments promised neutrality in any conflict caused by unprovoked attack upon either country by some other state. But the German government's wavering stance in the tense situation that later developed between Russia and Britain caused nervousness in Moscow and fears that arrangements might be in the making under which Germany would give foreign troops the right of transit across her territory for hostilities in Eastern Europe.<sup>5</sup>

The scene looked ominous from Moscow at this time. Soviet monetary assistance for British workers in their General Strike of 1926 was followed by raids on Soviet offices in Peking, Shanghai, and London, and the British government used documents taken in the raids as a basis for breaking diplomatic relations with the USSR in May 1927. The assassination of the Soviet ambassador to Poland, Voikov, two weeks later was interpreted in Moscow as evidence of a conspiratorial anti-Soviet movement rather than as the isolated act of a young White Russian anti-Communist that it appears to have been. Shortly thereafter the international horizon further darkened with the debacle of the Chinese Communist Party at the hands of the nationalist Chiang Kai-shek, who had enjoyed Soviet support. On top of all this, France broke off economic negotiations with the USSR and forced the recall of the Soviet ambassador, Christian Rakovskii. The intensified Soviet press discussion of the war danger caused genuine fears among the Soviet public, and the episode has gone down in history as the "Soviet war scare of 1926-27."

Given the mental set described above, it is not surprising that Soviet leaders were afraid that the Western powers were hatching plans for an anti-Soviet war. Historical scholarship has veered to the view that the leaders' fears, however unjustified, were real and that they contributed to the determination to build Soviet military defenses in a hurry through the heavy-industry-oriented Five-

4. Stalin, 7:11-14. This speech was first published after the Second World War.

5. Harvey Leonard Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia, 1926-1933: A Study in Diplomatic Instability* (New York, 1966), pp. 13, 68-72.

Year Plan.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, the war danger was deliberately exaggerated in connection with the anti-Trotskyist campaign then in its culminating phase—to support charges that the opposition was irresponsibly fomenting intraparty disension at a time of acute international tension.<sup>7</sup>

The menace of war was no less politically vital to Stalin in arguing his revolutionary General Line in 1928–29 against the Rightist orientation on balanced growth and gradualism in both industrialization and collectivization. He did not deviate from the position he had taken in opening a *Pravda* article in July 1927: “It is hardly open to doubt that the basic question of the present is the question of the threat of a new imperialist war. It is not a matter of some undefined and intangible ‘danger’ of a new war. It is a matter of a real and genuine *threat* of a new war in general and of a war against the USSR in particular.”<sup>8</sup>

Although the Trotskyist opposition was crushed by December 1927, Stalin reported to the Fifteenth Congress held that same month: “If two years ago it was possible and necessary to speak of a period of a certain balance and of ‘peaceful coexistence’ between the USSR and the capitalist countries, now we have every ground to assert that *the period of ‘peaceful coexistence’ is receding into the past*, giving way to a period of imperialist attacks and preparation of intervention against the USSR.” The temporary stabilization of capitalism was becoming “*more and more rotten and unstable*,” and preparations for a new war were “going forward full steam.”<sup>9</sup>

In the aftermath of the congress, Stalin persisted in emphasizing the seriousness of the war danger. Bukharin, as leader (in succession to Zinoviev) of the Comintern, prepared theses and a draft new program for the international organization, whose Sixth Congress was held in Moscow in the summer of 1928. He announced the advent of a postwar “third period” following the 1918–23 revolutionary period and the ensuing era of relative capitalist stabilization now nearing its end. So did Stalin. Between the two there was a sharp difference, however, in that Bukharin did not see the incipient third period as one of increasing breakdown of the stabilization, whereas Stalin did.<sup>10</sup> The defeat of Bukharin and his supporters at the July 1929 tenth plenum of the Comintern Executive Committee was accompanied by a resolution stating that the capitalist stabilization was “becoming more and more undermined” and that the third

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 89, 96–98. In “The Soviet War Scare of 1926–27,” *Russian Review*, 34, no. 1 (January 1975), John P. Sontag argues that the war scare was genuine, yet also “grossly and crudely manipulated by Soviet politicians in 1927.”

7. In 1929 the Soviet foreign commissar, Georgii Chicherin, told Louis Fischer, who spent several days with him in Wiesbaden where he was taking a cure: “I returned home in June 1927 from western Europe. Everybody in Moscow was talking war. I tried to dissuade them. ‘Nobody is planning to attack us,’ I insisted. Then a colleague enlightened me. He said, ‘Shh. We know that. But we need this against Trotsky.’” (Louis Fischer, *Russia's Road From Peace to War: Soviet Foreign Relations 1917–1941* [New York, 1969], p. 172; on the war scare episode as a whole, see pp. 165–79).

8. Stalin, 9:322.

9. Stalin, 10:281, 285, 288. Emphases added.

10. Stalin, 12:20–21; Stephen F. Cohen, *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Political Biography 1888–1938* (New York, 1973), pp. 391–92; and Franz Borkenau, *World Communism: A History of the Communist International* (Ann Arbor, 1962), pp. 336–37.

period was one of "the accelerated accentuation of the fundamental external and internal contradictions of imperialism leading inevitably to imperialist wars, to great class conflicts. . . ."11 Under Stalin's aegis the Comintern now executed a left turn which was tactically and rhetorically the counterpart of the internal revolution from above. Foreign Communist parties were enjoined to pursue the militant tactics of "class against class" as opposed to those of political cooperation with non-Communist socialist parties. The Communists were to intensify their fight against Social Democracy, which Stalin had described in 1924 as "objectively the moderate wing of fascism" and which was stigmatized now as "social-fascism."<sup>12</sup>

Between July 1929 and the gathering of the Soviet Sixteenth Party Congress in 1930, a real capitalist crisis broke out with the American stock market crash of October 1929 and the ensuing Great Depression. Stalin reported to the Sixteenth Congress that "we are living now in an epoch of wars and revolutions." The stabilization of capitalism is ending, he said, and the bourgeoisie will seek a way out in a new imperialist war. Still, there were two tendencies in bourgeois politics toward the USSR: the interventionist tendency and the contrary tendency toward trade and the preservation of peaceful relations. Soviet diplomacy would support the latter and do everything possible to maintain peace.<sup>13</sup>

We have noted the steady drumbeat of Stalin's invocations of the war danger between 1925 and 1930, his sense of the present as the prelude to a new round of wars and revolutions reminiscent of the 1917–23 period. That these invocations served his interest in the contests against the Trotskyist and Bukharinist oppositions is certainly true. But they likewise expressed his purposes in politics. His foreign policy, it must be emphasized, was anything but warlike during those years and even after. Operating as he did on the assumption that a war was inevitable, it was Stalin's purpose to postpone it and make use of the time thus gained for creating a powerful Soviet heavy industry and war industry with all possible speed. The expectation of war was also the underlying premise of his foreign policy. In the oncoming new war Stalin saw an opening for the further advance of Communist revolution.

### *The Path of Revolutionary Advance*

On no subject was foreign opinion more inclined to err in the 1930s and early 1940s than on Stalin's foreign policy. The apostle of socialism in one country was widely (though not universally) viewed as a nationalist leader who, in fact if not in theory, had jettisoned international Communist revolution as an operative aim of Soviet policy. Simplistic thinking, based on the unreal antithesis of "Russian nationalism" versus "world revolution," blocked an understanding of Stalinism in foreign policy as the subtle amalgam of both that it was.<sup>14</sup> In

11. *The Communist International 1919–1943*, ed. Jane Degras, vol. 3 (London, 1971), p. 42.

12. Stalin, 6:282. In "The Strange Case of the Comintern," *Survey*, 18 (Summer 1972): 91–137, Theodore Draper has traced Soviet use of the phrase "social-fascism" to 1922 and original authorship of the concept to Zinoviev.

13. Stalin, 12:246, 254–56, 260–61.

14. For examples see Nicholas S. Timasheff, *The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia* (New York, 1946), chapter 6; S. Harper, *The Russia I*

charity to those who erred, it must be said that Stalin, for reasons of *Realpolitik* encouraged the misconception.

Those who saw the international revolution as a dead letter in Stalin's foreign policy had seeming warrant not only in Stalin's words on various occasions but also in Soviet actions—and inactions—of the late 1920s and early 1930s. As Bukharin told Kamenev during their clandestine conversation of July 1928, "Externally Stalin is following a rightist policy." And hypercaution was in fact the keynote of the policies pursued abroad at this time and after. Stalin's regime showed an anxious concern for the maintenance of international peace. When William Bullitt arrived in Moscow in December 1933 as American ambassador, following United States recognition of Soviet Russia, Foreign Commissar Litvinov informed him in their first official conversation that the Soviet government wanted to join the League of Nations, an organization long reviled in Soviet publicity as a tool of Anglo-French imperialism. He explained the shift of policy by the desire to secure Russia on its western borders at a time when a Japanese attack was believed imminent in the Far East.<sup>15</sup>

However, those who thought that Stalinism meant the abandonment of international Communist revolution were mistaken. A foreign policy must be understood in terms of its longer-range perspective as well as the actions of the moment. At the end of the 1920s and in the early 1930s Stalin and his associates were preoccupied with the internal revolution from above, knew that Soviet society was in no condition to fight a war, and feared any external complications that could lead to war. But preparation of the country for a future war was the primary purpose of the policies being pursued; and the war prospect was a revolutionary one as well.

Even in mid-1925, the heyday of what many have taken to be his *intellectual* as well as tactical alliance with the party's right wing, Stalin flatly stated: those who see the present period of calm and capitalist stabilization as the end of world revolution "are mistaken."<sup>16</sup> Moreover, his version of the theory of socialism in one country—as distinct from Bukharin's—laid heavy stress on the continuation of the international Communist revolution as the necessary precondition for making the future victory of socialist construction in the USSR a "final" one. Although a socialist society could be built in an isolated Russian state, he argued, this Soviet socialism could not be made *fully secure*, guaranteed against the dan-

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*Believe In* (Chicago, 1945), p. 144; and Bernard Pares, *A History of Russia* (New York, 1944), p. 497. Among foreign observers who did not fall victim to the unreal antithesis were George F. Kennan, Boris I. Nicolaevsky, and Henry C. Wolfe. See Kennan's *Memoirs 1925-1950* (Boston, 1967), pp. 70-73; Nicolaevsky, "Vneshniaia politika Moskvy," *Novyi zhurnal*, 1942, no. 3, pp. 199-200; and Wolfe, *The Imperial Soviets* (New York, 1940), especially chapter 12.

15. *For the President, Personal and Secret: Correspondence Between Franklin D. Roosevelt and William C. Bullitt*, ed. Orville H. Bullitt (Boston, 1972), pp. 68-69; U.S., Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: Diplomatic Papers: The Soviet Union 1933-1939* (Washington, D.C., 1952), pp. 60-61. On the defensive character of Soviet foreign policy in this period, see George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* (New York, 1960), pp. 265-66; and Max Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia 1929-1941*, vol. 1 (London and New York, 1947), especially chapter 3.

16. Stalin, 7:93-94.

ger of successful foreign military intervention and overthrow, until the Communist revolution spread farther. Nor did Stalin drop this line of reasoning once he had finished off the Trotskyist opposition. In 1938, he took advantage of a private letter from an obscure Komsomol functionary named Ivanov to restate it fully, unequivocally, and in public.

Ivanov had been fired from his job as a propagandist on the charge—that which none could be more deadly in that year of terror—that he was guilty of political heresy in his failure to affirm that socialism had won “final victory” in the USSR and that the country was therefore fully guaranteed against intervention from without and the restoration of capitalism. In his lengthy reply, Stalin gave Ivanov firm support. He declared that “since we do not live on an island but in a ‘system of states,’ a considerable number of which are hostile to the land of socialism, creating a danger of intervention and restoration, we say openly and honestly that the victory of socialism in our country is not yet final.” To make it final would only be possible “through combining the serious efforts of the international proletariat with the still more serious efforts of our whole Soviet people.”<sup>17</sup> Though guardedly formulated in these words, the idea that the finality of socialism’s victory in the USSR depended on the further spread of Communist revolution abroad could not have been made more unmistakable.

But if Stalin kept faith with the Bolshevik commitment to the further progress of the international Communist revolution, he was innovative in his manner of envisaging the progress and the Soviet role in securing it. His vision of future Communist revolutions was Russocentric. Because his revolutionism was blended with his Great Russian nationalism, the further progress of Communist revolution was associated in his mind with the future extension of the international power and dominion of Soviet Russia and its territorial aggrandizement. Stalin showed his Russocentrism when he wrote in 1921 that Soviet Russia, so far a “socialist island” in the capitalist encirclement, would be better off if it had “*as neighbors* one large industrially developed or several Soviet states.”<sup>18</sup> Four years later, in his report to the Fourteenth Party Congress, he mentioned the loss of western Ukrainian and Belorussian territories to Poland as a fact formalized by the Versailles treaty and now again by the Locarno conference of 1925.<sup>19</sup> These words foreshadowed the future incorporation of eastern Poland into the Soviet Union, for which Stalin would be honored in the Soviet press as the “gatherer of Rus’”—a title once bestowed upon the Muscovite tsars.

At the end of 1924, Stalin had written that the paths of development of the world revolution were “not so simple” as seemed earlier. Once it had been thought that the revolution would develop through the ripening of elements of socialism in the more advanced countries at the same time, but that idea was in need of substantial modification. The more likely prospect was that the world revolution would develop through the revolutionary “falling away” (*otpadenie*) of more countries from the system of imperialist states, following the path of the “first fallen-away country.”<sup>20</sup> In 1926 Stalin indicated where he thought the new

17. *Pravda*, February 14, 1938.

18. “The Party Before and After Taking Power,” in Stalin, 5:109. Emphasis added.

19. Stalin, 7:273.

20. “The October Revolution and the Tactics of the Russian Communists,” in Stalin, 6:396–97, 398–99.

fallen-away lands would be located. No matter what successes might be scored in the construction of Soviet socialism, he said, the country would not be guaranteed against danger from without so long as it remained isolated in the capitalist encirclement. "So in order to win conclusively, we must ensure that the present capitalist encirclement is replaced by a socialist encirclement, that the proletariat is victorious at least in several countries."<sup>21</sup> A "socialist encirclement" would necessarily consist of countries girdling the USSR.

Given his Russocentric orientation, it was natural—even inevitable—that Stalin would envisage the international Communist revolution as radiating outward from the Soviet Russian heartland in its future course; that he would foresee the emergence of a bipolar world. It was established Bolshevik doctrine that the October Revolution had split the world into two hostile "camps." As Stalin put it to the Fourteenth Congress in 1925, there were already two "centers of gravity." One was "Anglo-America," the center of gravity for bourgeois governments; the other was Soviet Russia, the center of gravity for the workers of the West and the revolutionaries of the East.<sup>22</sup> Although not long afterward he spoke of contradictions and even possible war between Britain and America, the provision of a bipolar world did not change. In his well-known 1927 interview with a group of visiting American sympathizers, he foresaw the formation of "two centers" on a world scale in the further course of the international revolution.<sup>23</sup>

The notion that the international Communist revolution would grow by accretion from the Soviet center was implicit in the very argumentation about socialism in one country reviewed above. Further socialist revolutions were needed to *guarantee the security* of the first. They would give Russia's revolution a deep defensive glacis as well as control over territory and resources that would thereby be detached from the capitalist world; and then no conceivable anti-Soviet military intervention could succeed.

Such was Stalin's design for a foreign policy that might be described as imperial communism. Innovative in its envisagement of the path of revolutionary advance, it also involved a momentous innovation in regard to the means of effecting the anticipated future advance.

### *The Uses of Diplomacy*

Once in power, the Bolshevik revolutionaries quickly discovered how valuable diplomacy could be as a defensive weapon to ensure the Soviet Republic's survival by keeping its enemies divided. As Lenin put it, "So long as we have not won the whole world, so long as we remain economically and militarily weaker than what is left of the capitalist world, we must stick to the rule: be able to exploit the contradictions and oppositions between the imperialists. If we had not followed this rule, we would long ago have been hanged on separate aspen trees to the capitalists' general joy. Our basic experience in this respect came from concluding the Brest treaty."<sup>24</sup>

21. "On the Social Democratic Deviation in Our Party," in Stalin, 8:263.

22. Stalin, 7:281–82.

23. *Pravda*, September 15, 1927.

24. Speech of December 6, 1920 to Moscow party activists, in V. I. Lenin, *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii*, 5th ed., 55 vols. (Moscow, 1958–65), 42:56 (hereafter cited as Lenin).

The Brest-Litovsk treaty was the territorially costly separate peace that the fledgling Soviet government had concluded with Germany in March 1918 at Lenin's insistence and against the opposition of numerous party comrades who favored revolutionary war against the advancing German armies or a policy of no-war-no-peace. It was the first and for Lenin the classic case of an agreement with a capitalist government for the sake of Soviet survival.

Were there at present deep intercapitalist divisions which Soviet diplomacy could similarly utilize? Lenin affirmed that there were—above all three: Japanese-American rivalry in the Pacific; the broader contradictions between America and the rest of the capitalist world, Europe in particular; and the deep discord between the Entente powers and defeated Germany.<sup>25</sup>

In relations with countries of the East (a term by which early bolshevism designated roughly what we mean today by the "Third World"), Leninist foreign policy assigned to diplomacy an indirectly revolutionary role. It followed from *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* that the departure of any colonial dependency from an imperialist country's sphere of control and economic exploitation must necessarily aggravate both the competitive struggle between different imperialisms over whatever areas remained available for exploitation and the class contradictions inside the imperialist country that had lost the given colony as a market for capital exports and a source of superprofits which would be used in part to keep working-class discontent from boiling over into revolt. Hence Soviet diplomacy could indirectly promote the revolutionary cause by giving aid and support to movements for national liberation and independence in the East or to established governments which were concerned to make their countries more independent of the West. Such was the sense of the dictum attributed to Lenin (whether he ever said it or not) that the road to Paris runs through Peking.

No matter that the leaders of the nationalist movements, such as Kemal in Turkey, were anti-Communist in some instances; that they suppressed their native Communists; that their programs went no farther than independence and national development under bourgeois banners. Rapprochement with them and the governments formed by them, or even with established Eastern governments disposed to throw off Western tutelage, was a defensive Soviet interest in that it fostered the rise of friendly states on Russia's periphery. Thus, the Foreign Commissariat (Narkomindel) under Chicherin pursued with Lenin's most active support a fundamentally anti-British diplomacy of friendship with non-Communist Turkey, Afghanistan, and Persia.

Later in the 1920s, the chief theater of the politics of Soviet alliance with revolutionary nationalism was China. Here Moscow went beyond ordinary diplomacy to link itself with Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang, a nationalist party that was based in Canton and aspired to establish its rule over the whole of China. The Chinese Communists were directed through the Comintern to join and work within the Kuomintang.

Ever conscious of present-past parallels, Stalin told the Chinese Commission of the Comintern Executive Committee in November 1926 that the coming national revolutionary regime in China would be reminiscent of the "democratic

25. *Ibid.*, pp. 56, 60–69.

dictatorship of proletariat and peasantry" which Lenin had envisaged for Russia during the Revolution of 1905, save that it would be anti-imperialist primarily. He also maintained that unlike traditional revolutions, including Russia's in 1905, which usually started with an unarmed people's rising, China was showing a new pattern of revolutionary militarism: "In China it is not an unarmed people that faces the troops of an old government but an armed people in the person of its revolutionary army. In China an armed revolution is fighting against an armed counterrevolution."<sup>26</sup> The notion of an "armed revolution" was an integral element of emergent Stalinism in foreign policy. However, the defeat suffered by Soviet policy when Chiang Kai-shek turned against Moscow's tutelage and slaughtered Chinese Communists en masse in 1927 must have convinced Stalin, to judge by his actions in later life, that the only reliable force for armed revolution was his own Red Army.

The terrible setback of Chinese communism at the hands of Chiang Kai-shek has gone down in scholarly history as "Stalin's failure in China."<sup>27</sup> Undeniably it was a failure, yet two points bear emphasis in a general appraisal. First, the politics of Soviet alliance with a Chinese nationalist movement were Leninist. Second, it is not clear how tragic the Chinese Communist defeat was from the special standpoint of Stalin's Russo-imperial communism. Given China's size, population, geopolitical position, and imperial traditions, Stalin knew that a Communist China would inevitably develop into a second hegemonic center of world communism, and the prospect could not have pleased him. Such an interpretation of his thinking is consistent with his subsequent behavior. In 1945, according to Mao Tse-tung, "Stalin tried to prevent the Chinese revolution by saying that there should not be any civil war and that we must collaborate with Chiang Kai-shek. At that time we did not carry this into effect, and the revolution was victorious. After the victory, they again suspected that China would be like Yugoslavia and I would become a Tito."<sup>28</sup>

Of all the teachings of Lenin, none impressed Stalin more deeply than the view that intercapitalist discords were an invaluable asset which it was the duty of Soviet diplomacy to exploit to the fullest possible extent. Conflicts and contradictions between capitalist countries were unquestionably "the greatest support of our regime and our revolution," Stalin affirmed, for example, in a speech to a Moscow party conference in January 1925, and then continued: "This may seem strange but it is a fact, comrades. If the two main coalitions of capitalist countries during the imperialist war in 1917 had not been engaged in mortal combat against each other, if they had not been at one another's throat, not been preoccupied and lacking in time to enter a contest with the Soviet regime, the Soviet regime would hardly have survived then. Struggle, conflicts, and wars between our enemies are, I repeat, our greatest ally."<sup>29</sup>

26. Stalin, 7:357-58, 363.

27. See, for example, Conrad Brandt, *Stalin's Failure in China 1924-1927* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958); and Leon Trotsky, *The Third International After Lenin* (New York, 1970), pp. 167-230.

28. "Excerpts from Confidential Speeches, Directives and Letters of Mao Tse-tung," *New York Times*, March 1, 1970, p. 26. See also Vladimir Dedijer, *Tito* (New York, 1953), p. 322.

29. Stalin, 7:27.

This and other statements show that Stalin fully accepted Lenin's view of Brest as the classic example of divisive diplomacy. In his 1924 codification of Leninist doctrine, *The Foundations of Leninism*, Stalin twice cited Lenin to that effect. Moreover, the Brest precedent was a prominent theme in an *Izvestiia* article of January 1929 which may be taken as a foreign-policy manifesto of that opening phase of the Stalin period proper; its high-level authorship was reflected in the pseudonymous signature "Outsider." What Lenin accomplished in the Brest period, in spite of serious internal opposition, "in no way represents a *single episode* limited to a definite historical period," wrote Outsider. His utilizing of interimperialist contradictions to gain a breathing spell for the Soviet regime was still a valid model. The longer the imperialists delayed their attack, the more time Soviet Russia would have to build up its socialist economy. So, the first and basic directive of Leninist foreign policy was: "*to stretch out the breathing spell for as long as possible—the breathing spell won by the Soviet Republic for the first time in the Brest period.*"<sup>30</sup>

How to accomplish this while pursuing the longer-range expansionist aim of his imperial communism was Stalin's central foreign-policy problem in the later 1920s and in the 1930s. Given his parallel-haunted political mind, given the Lenin-identification that disposed him to "do a Lenin" at every critical juncture,<sup>31</sup> and given the subconscious resentment and rivalry that made him want to outdo his dead identity-figure in the process, Stalin was bound to envision himself bringing off a diplomatic masterstroke like Lenin's Brest, save that instead of trading space for time, it would gain both. Lenin himself had invited such a thought in a rather enigmatic passage of that speech of December 6, 1920 in which he said it was Soviet diplomacy's task to capitalize upon the contradictions between two imperialisms by setting them against one another. Having cited Brest as the first great example of such a diplomacy, he asserted: "One should not draw the conclusion that treaties may [only] be like Brest or Versailles. That is untrue. There can also be a third treaty, advantageous to us."<sup>32</sup> Although Lenin did not specify the distinguishing feature of the advantageous third kind of treaty, he manifestly had in mind that Russia's revolutionary interests would somehow be promoted by it. Lenin-textualist that he was, Stalin must have pondered the quoted lines carefully. Brest and Versailles had in common as disadvantageous treaties—to Russia and Germany respectively—the sacrifice of vital territorial interests. One could infer that the revolutionary interests to be served by the "third treaty" were territorial ones.<sup>33</sup> Diplomacy, in the very

30. *Izvestiia*, January 22, 1929. For an English translation, see Xenia J. Eudin and Robert M. Slusser, *Soviet Foreign Policy 1928–1934: Documents and Materials*, vol. 1 (University Park and London, 1966), pp. 158–66.

31. On Lenin as Stalin's identity-figure, whom he aspired to match or outdo in history-making exploits, see Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin As Revolutionary 1879–1929: A Study in History and Personality* (New York, 1973), chapters 4, 12, and 13.

32. Lenin, 42:56. Although not in the text, the word "only" belongs to the sentence's sense in the context of what follows.

33. I am not suggesting that this was what Lenin had in mind. In general, Stalin's imperial-Communist orientation on contiguous territories as fields for revolutionary advance was a departure from Leninist thinking about the future course of Communist revolution. Stalin's bolshevism was fused with Russian nationalism; Lenin's was not. I am indebted to Professor Moshe Lewin for suggesting that this point be stressed.

act of keeping Russia's enemies divided in order to prolong the breathing spell, would thereby acquire a revolutionarily offensive role, serving the (in Stalin's mind) fused interests of Soviet and international communism.

A future war situation would be the appropriate setting for the revolutionary advance. The outlines of such a scenario were clear in Stalin's mind as early as 1925. In addressing the closed Central Committee plenum on January 19, he said that a new war would become inevitable within a few years. It was imperative, therefore, to be ready for anything, to prepare the army and air force and raise them to the requisite height. But this, said Stalin, did not mean that Russia should initiate hostilities. "Our banner remains, as before, the banner of *peace*. But if war begins, we shall not be able to sit with folded hands—we shall have to make a move, but the move will come last. And we shall act so as to throw the decisive weight onto the scales, the weight that could be preponderant."<sup>34</sup> War would thus be the pathway to the Communist revolution's territorial advance, which would finally give the revolution of socialist construction in Russia the security of tenure that was attainable in no other way. Diplomacy had its critically important part to play in his context.

At that time there was a flaw in the war-and-revolution scenario: no existing antagonism was deep enough to generate a big new interimperialist war. Stalin frankly admitted as much in his public speech of January 27, 1925 to the Moscow party conference. Having stated that conflicts and wars between Russia's enemies were her "greatest ally," he went on: "But since the pluses of capital in this sphere are, so far, greater than its minuses, and military collisions between the capitalists are not to be expected any day, clearly matters don't yet stand the way we would like with our third ally."<sup>35</sup> These words did not imply that Stalin was impatiently awaiting the outbreak of war. Since some years would be needed to prepare the country for all contingencies, prolongation of the existing international peace was essential. Eventually, however, the predicted interimperialist war would come. The mission of Stalin's diplomacy was to expedite this development and to ward off the danger that the new war would start as an onslaught against the Soviet Union.

### *The German Orientation*

Interviewing Stalin in December 1931, the German biographer Emil Ludwig said that he had observed in Russia a general enthusiasm for everything American. "You exaggerate," Stalin replied. Although American efficiency and straightforwardness were appreciated, he said, there was no special respect for everything American. If there was any nation toward which Soviet sympathies were strong, it was the Germans. "Our feelings toward the Americans bear no comparison with these sympathies!"<sup>36</sup>

34. Stalin, 7:12-14.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 38. Stalin had listed the Western proletariat and the oppressed colonial peoples as the first and second allies. But elsewhere in the speech he implicitly put the inter-imperialist contradictions in or near first place by calling them "our greatest (*velichaishii*) ally."

36. Stalin, 13:114-15.

After inquiring the reason for the ardent pro-German sympathies (to which Stalin archly replied, if only because Germany gave the world Marx and Engels), Ludwig said that recent Soviet-Polish talks about a nonaggression treaty had aroused alarm among German politicians. Should Poland's present borders receive official Soviet recognition, it would be deeply disappointing to the German people, which had taken the USSR's opposition to the Versailles system seriously. In his carefully worded response, Stalin stressed that a Soviet-Polish nonaggression agreement would mean nothing more than an undertaking by the two states not to attack one another. It would be neither a recognition of the Versailles system nor a guarantee of Poland's borders. "We have never been Poland's guarantors and never will be, just as Poland has not and will not be a guarantor of ours. Our friendly relations with Germany remain just what they have been so far. Such is my firm conviction. So, the alarm of which you speak is utterly unfounded."<sup>37</sup>

Stalin's German orientation was not rooted in anything personal. It belonged to his Bolshevik political culture and the legacy of Lenin. Not only had Germany been one of Lenin's domiciles in emigration, its pre-1914 Social Democracy a chrysalis of his Marxist thought and its wartime "state capitalism" a pattern that he admired sufficiently to offer to early Soviet Russia as an object of emulation, but the Brest treaty, that primal act of diplomacy to which the Bolshevik Revolution owed its survival, was an accord between Moscow and Berlin.

In December of 1920, Lenin visualized an alliance with Germany as an attractive option for Moscow's divisive diplomacy. "Germany is one of the strongest advanced capitalist countries, it cannot put up with the Versailles treaty, and Germany, herself imperialist, must seek an ally against world imperialism," he said in his speech of December 6. "Here is a situation we must utilize." Recent developments in Germany made this seem propitious.

The prominent Bolshevik figure and expert on German affairs, Karl Radek, had gone to Germany in December 1918 to attend a Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Councils and was arrested not long after the abortive Spartacist rising of the following month. Among the Germans who visited him in a Berlin jail was General Ludendorff's aide, Colonel Bauer, who suggested an alliance between the German military, the German Communists, and Soviet Russia. Another visitor was a General Reibnitz who, as Radek later recalled, thought that the German officers "might strike a bargain with the Communist party and with Soviet Russia; they understand that we cannot be conquered and that we are Germany's allies in the struggle with the Entente."<sup>38</sup>

On the other side, two leading Hamburg Communists, Heinrich Laufenberg and Fritz Wolffheim, began to preach what came to be called "National Bolshevism," a program of revolutionary collaboration—or collusion—between German Communists and nationalists against the German government (then headed by the Social Democrat Friedrich Ebert) and the Versailles treaty. Radek publicly

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 115–17.

38. For the Bauer visit, see Warren Lerner, *Karl Radek: The Last Internationalist* (Stanford, 1970), p. 86; for Reibnitz's visit, see E. H. Carr, *The Bolshevik Revolution 1917–1923*, vol. 3 (New York, 1953), p. 314, which quotes a memoir later published by Radek in the Soviet journal *Krasnaia nov'*.

opposed this, and Lenin in early 1921 repudiated "the preposterous absurdities of 'National Bolshevism' (Laufenberg and others), which has gone to the length of advocating a bloc with the German bourgeoisie for war against the Entente."<sup>39</sup> But the idea that the Communists should make common cause with German nationalism did not die.

The German Communist leader Thalheimer found that the anti-Entente German bourgeoisie was playing an "objectively" revolutionary role, as had Bismarck, that "revolutionary from above," after 1848. Radek picked up this theme and in an article for the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Russian Communist Party's founding compared Bismarck with Lenin. In May 1923 he drafted a manifesto for the German party which drew a distinction between two kinds of Fascists: the ones "directly sold to capital" and those "mised nationalistic petty bourgeois" who failed to see that the way to overcome Germany's national disgrace was to join with the proletariat. At a session of the Comintern Executive Committee the following month, he went further and found the phrase "National Bolshevism" acceptable, saying "the strong emphasis on the nation in Germany is a revolutionary act, like the emphasis on the nation in the colonies."<sup>40</sup>

Later in the session, Radek gave a speech which caused a sensation in Germany. Called "Wanderer into the Void," after the title of a nationalistic novel then in vogue in Germany, it eulogized a young Fascist named Leo Schlageter who had served in the Freikorps (a paramilitary forerunner of Hitler's Storm Troopers) and as a Nazi party organizer. In May Schlageter had been executed by the French occupation authorities for trying to sabotage a railroad in the Ruhr, and the German nationalist resistance was making a hero out of him. Joining the campaign, Radek called him a "martyr of German nationalism" and appealed to the multitude of still living Schlageters, "the great majority of the nationalist minded masses," to become not wanderers into the void, but "wanderers into a better future for the whole of mankind" with the Communist movement.<sup>41</sup>

The Schlageter line drew favorable reaction from two prominent German right-wing nationalists, Count Ernst Reventlow and Moeller van den Bruck, who found common ground between nationalists and Communists—along with the problem that cooperation between them to create a new truly German order in place of the Weimar system would hardly be possible unless the German as well as Russian Communists proved themselves acceptable allies by eradicating Jewish influence.<sup>42</sup> The phenomenon of National Bolshevism acquired a twofold

39. *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, in *The Lenin Anthology*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York, 1975), p. 594.

40. E. H. Carr, *The Interregnum 1923–1924* (New York, 1954), pp. 159–60, 177.

41. *World News and Views (International Press Correspondence)*, June 28, 1923, pp. 460–61.

42. Abraham Ascher and Guenter Lewy, "National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany: Alliance of Political Extremes Against Democracy," *Social Research*, Winter 1956, pp. 464–66. For a time during the tense summer of 1923 Communists and Nazis shared platforms at protest mass meetings, although one Nazi speaker remarked that the Communists could never be national so long as they were led by "Radek-Sobelsohn and whatever the other Jews are called" (Carr, *The Interregnum*, pp. 182–83). In mid-August the Nazis banned such common meetings. Nazi anti-Semitism was an embarrassment for the Communists at that time, Carr observes here, although a Communist proclamation was reported by the Berlin-

connotation: on the one hand, the Communist tactic of associating themselves with German nationalism for their own revolutionary purposes; on the other, the attraction that extreme nationalists like Reventlow and van den Bruck felt for bolshevism as a virile movement opposed to the Weimar system, the Entente, and Versailles.

Such a pathbreaking move as Radek's Schlageter speech could not have been taken without higher political sanction. Radek himself later said that it had been endorsed by Zinoviev in his capacity as Comintern chief. Since this was the time of Stalin's triumvirate with Zinoviev and Kamenev in the Politburo, he too must have approved it. Stalin could understand the power of nationalism because he himself felt it. As a Bolshevik Russian nationalist, he would have readily appreciated the uses of National Bolshevism as a tactic for the German Communists. In later years, very likely through psychological projection, he was always suspecting foreign Communist leaders of hidden national Bolshevik tendencies and seeking to combat them. He would never have wanted National Bolshevism to come to power in Germany, or anywhere else outside of Russia, but was quicker than most other Russian Bolshevik leaders to see that it was to the political advantage of communism, especially in Germany, to make common cause with nationalism. Considering, moreover, the readiness Stalin had long since shown to make sly use of anti-Semitism in intraparty political struggles, he was the least likely of all Bolshevik leaders to be outraged by the anti-Semitism of German nationalists. All in all, it is not surprising that the Schlageter line, though it quickly passed into history, was a portent of things to come in Stalin's politics and in Germany.

After the crisis of 1923 subsided, Moscow pursued its German policy primarily through state-to-state relations. Lenin's prevision of a Soviet-German alliance had borne fruit in the Rapallo treaty of 1922, which provided for full resumption of diplomatic relations, mutual cancellation of economic claims, and most-favored nation treatment. This coup of Lenin's divisive diplomacy opened the way for the anti-Versailles partnership between the Soviet and German governments during the 1920s. The relationship, though close, was also an uneasy one because of conflicting pressures on both partners. On the German side there was a division among influential circles and in the Foreign Ministry between men of Eastern orientation (the *Ostlers*), who saw the Russian connection as vital for Germany's revisionist goals, and those of Western orientation (the *Westlers*), who felt that Germany's interests, the territorial one included, could best be served by cooperation with the West. The German ambassador in Moscow, Count Brockdorff-Rantzau, and the man who succeeded him in that post in 1929, Herbert von Dirksen, were prominent *Ostlers*, as were the Reichswehr leaders who valued the clandestine use of Soviet soil for military training and testing in collaboration with the Red Army. The German Social Democratic Party (SPD), on the other hand, was strongly wedded to the Western orientation.<sup>43</sup>

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based Menshevik *Sotsialisticheskii vestnik* to have said: "Jewish capitalists grow fat on the exploitation of the German people."

43. Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia*, pp. 103 and 141. The instability of the partnership is the key theme of this illuminating study. It is also shown in G. Hilger and

The latter circumstance helps to explain Stalin's extreme antipathy for the SPD. He told a German Communist journalist, Wilhelm Herzog, in February 1925 that a proletarian revolution was out of the question in Germany so long as the SPD had not been exposed, crushed, and reduced to an insignificant minority among the workers. Recalling that Lenin in the pre-October period had insisted on the Mensheviks' elimination as a prime condition of victory, Stalin said that now no firm German revolutionary victory was possible even in the best of external conditions as long as there were, within the working class, two competing parties of equal strength.<sup>44</sup> Stalin's antipathy extended, quite logically, to German Communists of moderate persuasion who favored a common front with amenable left-wing Social Democrats against the Fascist danger. One such person was the prominent German party leader Heinrich Brandler, who had opposed the Schlageter line in the 1923 crisis and sought a united front with the SPD left wing, looking to possible Communist participation in a coalition government.<sup>45</sup> Later in the month of his interview with Herzog, Stalin numbered Brandler, along with his associate Thalheimer, among the "old" leaders who, like the Lunacharskiis and Pokrovskiis in Russia, were passing out of the picture now; and stressed the need to eradicate "Brandlerism" from the German Communist Party.<sup>46</sup> Brandler's expulsion from party membership came in 1929, by which time it was official Comintern policy to damn Social Democracy as "social fascism."

The German alignment was a star by which Stalin steered Soviet diplomacy in the later 1920s and early 1930s. The anti-Entente memories of the Russian civil war were an enduring influence on his political thinking: the two great adversary poles of attraction in the contemporary world were the Soviet East and the capitalist West led by "Anglo-America." The now abundantly documented inner history of Moscow-Berlin relations in the later 1920s reveals the picture of a German government adhering generally to the Russian connection in the midst of a tug-of-war of pressures from West and East; and of a Stalin regime nervously fearful lest its German connection be lost due to a combination of the *Westlers'* influence internally and a determined effort by the Versailles powers to lure Berlin into their anti-Soviet camp with economic, political, and territorial concessions that they were in a position to give. From the talks on renewal of Rapallo that led to the 1926 Treaty of Berlin, to the talks of early 1931 on the latter's extension, the now available German Foreign Ministry correspondence shows the Soviet side regularly pressing the Germans to reaffirm their adherence to the Rapallo line and periodically taking initiatives to cement

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A. G. Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies: A Memoir-History of German-Soviet Relations 1918-1941* (New York, 1953). On the Rapallo accord as a result mainly of Soviet initiative, aimed at "the splitting off of the Germans from the others," see Kennan, *Russia and the West*, pp. 204 and 207. For a full historical account of Rapallo's diplomatic background, see Renata Bournazel, *Rapallo: Naissance d'un Mythe* (Paris, 1974).

44. Stalin, 7:36.

45. Ruth Fischer, *Stalin and German Communism: A Study in the Origins of the State Party* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948), pp. 287 and 313. Brandler, notes the author, wrote in the German party organ *Rote Fahne*: "Beat the Fascists wherever you meet them."

46. "Letter to Comrade Me--rt" (actually, to the German left Communist Arkadi Maslow), in Stalin, 5:43 and 45.

political, military, and economic ties with Berlin. Thus the 1931 talks found Litvinov offering the Germans a choice between straight renewal or a stronger treaty whereas the Germans favored simple renewal; and the Narkomindel wanted a five-year extension as against the original Wilhelmstrasse proposal of only six months.<sup>47</sup>

It is true that German dealings with the Russians were bedeviled by many frustrations and that for about a year in 1929–30—during the chancellorship of Hermann Müller, the first Social Democrat to hold that post since 1923—severe tensions brought by developments on the Soviet side plunged the partnership into a crisis. The earlier Soviet arrest of five German engineers and the subsequent trial of three of them in the Shakhty case was one of the developments.<sup>48</sup> The militant Communist demonstration in Berlin for May Day in 1929—an expression of the Comintern's new line—was another. A third was the descent on Moscow, during collectivization, of thousands of Mennonites of German extraction who were fleeing their villages in quest of a new home in Canada and whose plight greatly aroused German public opinion. Significantly, a series of Soviet initiatives for better relations caused the diplomatic crisis to subside in early 1930.

As Weimar Germany entered the time of its death agony, Moscow signed a nonaggression agreement with France (August 1931) with a view to defusing French anti-Sovietism; and in January 1932 it concluded a similar agreement with Poland. In doing so, the Narkomindel rejected the Poles' longstanding demand for a clause specifically recognizing the German-Polish border. But it agreed to a general formula defining aggression as any action violating the territorial integrity or political independence of either side.<sup>49</sup> To the worried Germans this looked like an "indirect guarantee" of the eastern borders they aspired one day to revise.

Stalin's forthright statement to Ludwig in December 1931 that the USSR would never be Poland's guarantor was obviously intended to reassure them that whatever phraseology was used in the impending treaty with Poland, they had no cause for alarm. He wanted to emphasize that Moscow's German orientation was still in force.

### *Stalin and the Nazi Revolution*

The Weimar Republic went down under the assault of the Great Depression and the Nazi movement, helped along by various political factors: the feebleness of the center forces, the absence of alert and vigorous political leadership on the

47. Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia*, pp. 229 and 235. In this and the following two paragraphs I rely heavily on the detailed documented record presented by Dyck.

48. Apropos of Stalin's "rightism" in foreign policy, Bukharin told Kamenev in July 1928 that Stalin was taking the line in the Politburo that there should be no death sentences in the Shakhty case. Indeed, two of the three Germans placed on trial were acquitted and the third was given a suspended sentence.

49. Dyck, *Weimar Germany and Soviet Russia*, pp. 236, 242–44. The author plausibly surmises here that the agreement with Poland was entailed by the prior Soviet-French agreement; and that in 1931 the Manchurian crisis along with Soviet internal preoccupations made nonaggression treaties with Poland and the Baltic states appear desirable to Moscow as added assurance of calm on its western borders.

part of those in authority, and, not least, the tactics pursued by the German Communists on orders from Moscow—from Stalin. By the summer of 1933, the Nazi dictatorship was firmly established.<sup>50</sup>

With their mass-worker and trade-union constituencies—a combined total of close to 40 percent of the Reichstag seats in November 1932 (representing about seven million Social Democratic votes and nearly six million Communist ones)—the two parties of the German Left were together a potentially powerful force for preservation of the constitutional order. Whether they could have prevented the Nazi victory by resolutely working in tandem and with other anti-Fascist elements toward this end is an unanswerable question. What is certain is that the absence of such cooperation, indeed the strife between the two parties during that critical time, facilitated the downfall of the constitutional order. Nor were Communist minds blind to the catastrophic character of the course being taken. As early as September 1930 Trotsky raised his powerful voice from Prinkipo exile to urge the German Communist Party (the KPD) to work with the SPD in a united front against fascism. He accurately forewarned that Hitler in power would be a “super-Wrangel,” that a Nazi victory would mean the crushing of the German working class and an inevitable war against the USSR, that the antiworker repressions of the Italian Fascists would appear pale and almost humane by comparison with what the Nazis would do, and that there would be no dislodging the Nazis once they took state power. Instinctively many German Communists took a similar view.<sup>51</sup>

Stalin had different ideas about the course to be followed. He forced upon the KPD a policy that abetted the Nazi victory. It coupled “National Bolshevism” in an updated version with uncompromising belligerence against Social Democracy (“social-fascism”). A Comintern Executive Committee directive to the German Communists in February 1930 demanded “merciless exposure” of Social Democracy, of its left wing in particular, as the basic force for establishing a Fascist dictatorship and for war against the USSR. The “National Bolshevism” tactics consisted now in competing with the Nazis for the mantle of German nationalism. Under Comintern direction the German Communist leader Heinz Neumann, in the summer of 1930, drafted a new KPD “Program of National and Social Liberation” which promised to annul the Versailles treaty and the Young Plan and which denounced the SPD as the treasonable party of Versailles. Competition with the Nazis went along with a certain amount of collaboration. In the summer of 1931, the Communists, on orders from Moscow, joined in a Nazi- and rightist-organized plebescite against the SPD state government in Prussia. At a Nazi meeting chaired by Goebbels, for example, Heinz Neumann coupled his call for an assault on Western capitalism with, reportedly, the words:

50. Karl Dietrich Bracher, *The German Dictatorship: The Origins, Structure, and Effects of National Socialism*, trans. Jean Steinberg (New York, 1970), chapter 4.

51. Leon Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany* (New York, 1971), pp. 125–29, 139. In “The German Communists’ United-Front and Popular-Front Ventures,” *The Comintern: Historical Highlights*, ed. Milorad M. Drachkovitch and Branko Lazitch (New York, 1966), p. 115, Babette L. Gross writes from experience that for members of the German Communist Party at that time, “the Nazi bully squads were the main adversary; they had to be counterattacked, their blows warded off.”

"Young Socialists! Brave fighters for the nation: the Communists do not want to engage in fraternal strife with the National Socialists."<sup>52</sup>

The leaning toward a united anti-Fascist front with the SPD was not entirely confined to the Communist rank and file; there were signs of it among the party leaders too. Ernst Thaelmann rebelled at first against the instruction to participate in the anti-SPD Prussian plebescite. Then he, Hermann Remmele, and Heinz Neumann "were called to Moscow to learn at first hand that this instruction had been issued to the Communist International by Stalin personally."<sup>53</sup> Another former German Communist, who worked in the Comintern offices in Moscow in 1932 and survived a lengthy later incarceration in Soviet concentration camps, recalls that "as early as 1932 there existed in the leadership of the KPD as well as in the Comintern machine a marked readiness to set up a 'united front' with the Social Democrats which would have prevented the victory of National Socialism. But their timid proposals were not adopted. The influence of Stalin—who held fast to his line, while any criticism of it was instantly branded as 'antiparty heresy,' if not as 'provocation by agents of international capitalism'—was decisive."<sup>54</sup>

The SPD leadership, concerned over its ties with the Catholic and Center parties, also held back from collaboration with the Communists. By the autumn of 1932, however, the depth of the crisis made the urgency of collaboration clear. An SPD leader, Friedrich Stampfer, obtained an interview with the Soviet envoy in Berlin, Lev Khinchuk, himself a former Russian Menshevik. "Would it be possible to expect the cooperation of Communism in the struggle against National Socialism?" Stampfer asked Khinchuk. Several interviews followed between Stampfer and a Soviet embassy attaché, Vinogradov, who finally broke off the exchanges by saying: "Moscow is convinced that the road to Soviet Germany leads through Hitler."<sup>55</sup>

Stalin's decisive personal role in the KPD policies that abetted the Nazi revolution is beyond doubt. Insofar as the possibility existed of heading off this event by encouraging a united front of the German Left and other anti-Nazi forces, he was chiefly responsible for its failure to materialize. His decision may therefore have been a critical one in its consequences. To some it has seemed an act of monumental political ineptitude stemming from failure to grasp the revolutionary nature of National Socialism or a belief that its victory—as was said in Communist circles at that time—would be short-lived and pave German communism's way to power. Such interpretations are unconvincing. The then current version about a short-lived Nazi victory bears earmarks of a convenient rational-

52. Ascher and Lewy, "National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany," pp. 472, 478-79. For the February 1930 Comintern directive, see *Kommunisticheskie Internatsional' v dokumentakh 1919-1932*, part 2 (Moscow, 1933), p. 946.

53. Gross, "The German Communists' United-Front and Popular-Front Ventures," p. 117. The author, herself the sister of Margarete Buber-Neumann (Heinz Neumann's wife), also reports here (p. 116) that on a visit to Moscow in April 1931 Neumann heard Stalin criticize the KPD for having cooperated with the SPD in Thuringia in bringing about a vote of no-confidence in the Nazi minister of the interior, Wilhelm Frick.

54. Ex-Insider, "Moscow—Berlin 1933," *Survey*, no. 44-45 (October 1962), p. 162.

55. Stampfer subsequently settled in the United States where he revealed this information in an interview. See David J. Dallin, *Russia and Postwar Europe*, trans. F. K. Lawrence (New Haven, 1943), pp. 61-62 n.

ization put out by Stalin's headquarters. However inadequate his understanding of Hitler and the Nazi movement may have been in 1930–33, Stalin knew enough about Italian fascism's staying powers, not to mention Russian bolshevism's, to beware of assuming that the Nazis could not create a stable single-party system and extirpate resistance with ruthless terror, as they did. We must take into account that Stalin, despite his doctrinaire cast of mind, was an astute politician, reasonably well informed, and given to acting with a carefully thought out rationale. Although complex, the rationale in this instance is not hard to reconstruct.

First, elemental caution dictated that the German Communists be restrained from any attempt at a seizure of power, no matter how revolutionary the German situation. In the comparable circumstances of 1923, Stalin had argued in a letter to Zinoviev that the German Communists should be restrained on the grounds that their position was not so favorable as the Bolsheviks' in 1917 in Russia and that "if power in Germany were, so to speak, to fall to the street and the Communists picked it up, it would end in failure and collapse."<sup>56</sup> He had ample reason to take the same view in 1932. Even if a coup should initially succeed, the German Communists could not possibly hold out on their own against combined internal and external counterrevolutionary forces. The USSR for its part was in no position to come to their aid or to risk any international complications that might result in early war. Separated from Germany by hostile Poland, preoccupied with its *piatiletka*, stricken by famine, it would be condemned to stand by helplessly and ignominiously while German communism was being overthrown and destroyed.

For different reasons Stalin could not look with favor on a KPD bloc with the SPD and other amenable elements to prevent the fall of the Weimar system. Even such a policy entailed some small risk of international anti-Soviet complications which had to be avoided at all costs. And supposing the policy succeeded and the Nazis were stopped from taking power, what then? As a partner in an anti-Nazi coalition of the German Left, the KPD would be in no position to make a revolution of its own. As Stalin had said in his interview with Herzog, the existence of two more or less evenly balanced working-class parties excluded the possibility of a Communist revolution. Still more compelling, in all likelihood, was the consideration that SPD politicians were inveterate *Westlers*, indeed the chief German force for a Western orientation in foreign policy. As probably the dominant partner in the anti-Nazi coalition, their foreign-policy orientation would be influential. No prospect could have been less pleasing to Stalin.

The only serious remaining possibility was the path that Stalin took. Accepting and even indirectly abetting the Nazi takeover was a course that offered promise along with dangers to the USSR (but in what direction were there no dangers?) and the certainty that German communism would be severely repressed and have to go underground. Despite their shrill ideological antibolshevism and anti-Slav racism (along with anti-Semitism, which would not grieve Stalin), the Nazis were not *Westlers*. Their movement was stridently national-

56. Quoted by Carr, *The Interregnum*, p. 187. See also Trotsky, *The Struggle Against Fascism in Germany*, pp. 111–12. Although Stalin did not later include the letter in his collected works, he acknowledged its authenticity in a Central Committee plenum of 1927 (see Stalin, 10:61–62).

istic, revanchist, illiberal, antidemocratic, antipacifist, and anti-Versailles. They were plainly a bellicose force. Their accession to power might then be a harbinger of great tension, if not a new war, between Germany and the West. We have direct testimony that this was what Stalin thought. In a conversation with Heinz Neumann at the end of 1931, he said: "Don't you believe, Neumann, that if the Nationalists seize power in Germany they will be so completely preoccupied with the West that we will be able to build up socialism in peace?"<sup>57</sup>

Stalin's line of thought and action—or inaction—at this critical juncture was consistent with his war-and-revolution scenario. By accepting, if not actively facilitating, the Nazi takeover, he was guiding events in the direction he had long wanted them to take—toward a war between opposed imperialisms in Europe. This was not, as he knew, an early prospect, for it would be a matter of years, at best, before the Nazis could rearm Germany for war. But an early outbreak of war was not something for which Russia was prepared either. What the Nazi victory portended was the end of passivity in German foreign policy. A liberal democratic Weimar Germany perpetually poised between *Ostpolitik* and *Westpolitik*, wavering between the Russian connection and the Western alignment into which she was regularly being drawn by anti-Soviet politicians and capitalists in America, Britain, France, and Germany herself, would never go to war against the West for German interests. A Nazi Germany might. There was of course the alternate possibility that a Nazi Germany would march against Russia. But Stalin reckoned that he could contain this threat by the devices of diplomacy. Time and events would show that up to a point the calculation was a shrewd one.

As the Nazi revolution drew near, Moscow signaled its readiness for it, indeed its cautious hopefulness regarding it. In July 1932 the counselor of the German embassy in Moscow, Hilger, had a talk with Doletskii, the head of the Soviet news agency TASS. Along with Soviet worries, Doletskii communicated to Hilger "his conviction that healthy political common sense would win out in a National Socialist government; even the Nazis would be sensible and continue a policy toward Russia that, in his opinion, was consonant with the long-range interests of Germany." "His conviction" was unquestionably the view that Doletskii had been commissioned to convey informally.<sup>58</sup>

A former German Communist writes that a saying was current in anti-Fascist German circles at that time, "Without Stalin, no Hitler," and that Zinoviev said to him in early 1933: "Apart from the German Social Democrats, Stalin bears the main responsibility to history for Hitler's victory."<sup>59</sup> There is no measuring degrees of responsibility in such complex matters. What the historian can do is to establish the fact of it and try to explain the reasons for it.

57. Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Von Potsdam nach Moskau: Stationen eines Irrweges* (Stuttgart, 1957), p. 284. The author adds here: "I haven't forgotten Stalin's question to Neumann because it was the first thing Heinz shared with me when he arrived at the Friedrichstrasse Station in Berlin."

58. Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, p. 253.

59. Erich Wollenberg, *The Red Army: A Study of the Growth of Soviet Imperialism* (London, 1940), p. 278. Wollenberg was one of the editors of *Rote Fahne* in 1932.

*First Overtures*

Using terror to solidify their power, the Nazis seized upon the pretext of the Reichstag fire to hound the members of the KPD into exile, into concentration camps, or underground. Initially, their relations with Moscow were clouded by a series of ugly incidents in which Nazi toughs invaded the premises of Soviet commercial and other offices in Berlin and in some instances molested their employees. The new German authorities hastened, however, to assure the Soviet government that their anti-Communist internal policies had nothing to do with their foreign policy.

On March 23, 1933 Hitler declared the Reich ready to cultivate friendly and mutually profitable relations with the USSR. "It is above all the government of the National Revolution who feel themselves in a position to adopt such a positive policy with regard to Soviet Russia," he said further. "The fight against Communism in Germany is our internal affair in which we will never permit interference from outside. Our political relations with other Powers to whom we are bound by common interests will not be affected thereby."<sup>60</sup> In early May, Hitler's government took the symbolic step of ratifying the protocol—signed in 1931 but left unratified by the Brüning and von Papen governments—on an extension of the 1926 Treaty of Berlin. More important, he received Khinchuk a few days before this and discussed some matters that bore on the "common interests" to which he had referred in the March 23 speech. Observing that Germany and Russia were linked by "mutual interests" of long-term character, Hitler said that these were both economic and political because the two countries had the same difficulties and the same enemies. "The Soviets, for example, must be concerned about their eastern frontier, while Germany must be concerned about her western frontier. Germany faces a hard economic situation, but that of the Soviets is not easy. In both instances, as in many others, one must remember all the time that the two countries can complement one another and render mutual services."<sup>61</sup> Stalin unquestionably read this with interest. Hitler was transparently hinting at the possibility of a Russo-German deal to carve up Poland.

Moscow's public posture was wary. Its chief commentator on German affairs now was Radek. After going into Siberian exile with other leading Trotskyists in January 1928, he had recanted his oppositionism in mid-1929, returned to Moscow, and reentered political life as a writer on foreign affairs and behind-the-scenes foreign-policy adviser to Stalin. In articles printed in *Bol'shevik* and *Pravda* in May–June 1933, Radek construed Hitler's conciliatory gestures as a means of gaining time and as a concession to German industrialists concerned to keep Soviet orders during the economic crisis. He also said that Alfred Rosenberg, whom he called "the inspirer of German fascism's foreign policy," had paid an unofficial visit to London to sound out British die-hards on a possible deal against the USSR. German fascism was combining its reassurances to Moscow with efforts to build an anti-Soviet coalition.

60. *Hitler's Speeches*, ed. N. H. Baynes, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1942), 2:1019, quoted by Beloff, *The Foreign Policy of Soviet Russia*, p. 25.

61. Report of April 28, 1933 from Khinchuk, in *Dokumenty vnesheinei politiki SSSR*, chief ed. A. A. Gromyko, vol. 16 (Moscow, 1970), p. 271.

Stalin did not intend to stand idly by in the face of the machinations Radek was describing. He knew that no attack could possibly be imminent at that early stage and he was aware of holding strong cards of his own in the diplomatic game for high stakes now beginning. Hitler had already indicated in his talk with Khinchuk that one common interest, hence potential basis of cooperation, between his Germany and Stalin's Russia was their respective revisionist claims upon different portions of Poland. If Hitler was disposed to pursue his revisionist aims in the West by means of war, Stalin was in a position to guarantee him against that German specter inherited from 1914–18—a two-front war. There was also reason to believe that Hitler's policies might be influenced by those very Reichswehr, nationalist, and capitalist circles which had been proponents of the Eastern orientation all along. One of them, General von Seeckt, had argued in a recently published pamphlet that it was useless for Germany to try and drive a wedge between Britain and France and that she needed Russia's friendship for attainment of her revisionist aims. Radek approvingly quoted the pamphlet at length in one of his articles, clearly implying that the general was talking sense.<sup>62</sup>

Finally, there was in National Socialism, itself a revolutionary movement, a current of admiration for revolutionary Russia. The rightist National Bolshevism of which we have spoken had its representatives among the Nazis. These *Rechtssowjetisten* saw Stalin as a true man of power (*Gewaltmensch*) and an exponent of Russian nationalism in opposition to the internationalist communism of those like Trotsky, whom they despised as rootless cosmopolitan Jews. Even Alfred Rosenberg's organ *Weltkampf* spoke (in 1929) of Stalin's anti-Semitism and said Russia could not be called a Jewish state since Trotsky had been deposed and non-Jews like Stalin, Kalinin, and Rykov were on the rise.<sup>63</sup> Not until Hitler's "night of the long knives," June 30, 1934, was the leftist anticapitalist strain purged from the Nazi movement. But that was still in the future.

Sedately, with no show of anxiety or alarm, Moscow signaled its interest in doing business with Berlin. Having reciprocated Hitler's action in ratifying the protocol on extension of the 1926 treaty, the Soviet government published an *Izvestiia* editorial on May 5, 1933 which reaffirmed the Rapallo tradition, pointed out that past unfriendly German policies toward the USSR had only weakened Germany, proclaimed the Soviet desire for peace and good economic relations with that country, and concluded that the now extended treaty "will have the significance given it by concrete actions of the parties that concluded it." In speeches of December 1933, both Foreign Commissar Litvinov and Premier Molotov made it explicit that Germany's external policy, not its internal one, was what concerned the USSR.<sup>64</sup>

More meaningful than these cautiously restrained public statements were messages communicated by Soviet officials in private. Time and again, Hilger recalls, Molotov, Litvinov, and Deputy Foreign Commissar Krestinskii went out

62. Karl Radek, *Podgotovka bor'by za novyi peredel mira* (Moscow, 1934), pp. 92–94. This book is a collection of Radek's articles published in 1933.

63. My account of National Bolshevism among the Nazis is based on Walter Laqueur, *Russia and Germany: A Century of Conflict* (London, 1965), pp. 154–58; and Ascher and Lewy, "National Bolshevism in Weimar Germany," pp. 469, 474–78.

64. M. M. Litvinov, *Vneshniaia politika SSSR* (Moscow, 1935), p. 70.

of their way to assure German representatives that the USSR had no wish to reorient its foreign policy. Moscow cordially received a group of high-ranking German officers who came in May 1933 for meetings with the Red Army general staff, although the German military stations on Soviet soil were closed down immediately on the guests' departure.<sup>65</sup> In October 1933, however, Tukhachevskii, the Soviet chief of staff, told the German chargé d'affaires, von Twardowski, that good will toward the Reichswehr had not diminished among his fellow officers and that the German army's aid in building up the Red Army would never be forgotten. War Commissar Voroshilov, early in 1934, recalled the two armies' collaboration with nostalgia and urged the new German ambassador (a strong *Ostler*, Rudolf Nadolny) to influence his government to follow a less anti-Soviet policy. "Just a few reassuring words from Hitler, he said, would be enough to show the Kremlin that *Mein Kampf* was no longer his basic policy statement."<sup>66</sup>

More outspoken, doubtless because his lack of high official position made him a more convenient conduit, was Radek. According to Hilger, Radek repeatedly said in private conversation that nothing would block Russia's path to friendship with Germany. But—his argument ran—the tough, cautious, and suspicious Stalin, who had read *Mein Kampf* in Russian translation, was uncertain as to Berlin's attitude. In August 1934, on the occasion of a visit to Moscow by a Nazi professor, Oberländer, who was believed to be a proponent of Soviet-German friendship, and in the presence of the German embassy's press attaché, Baum, as well as Bukharin, Radek expressed admiration for the Nazis' organizing talent, the power of their movement, and its youth's enthusiasm. As Baum reported the conversation to his colleague Hilger, both Radek and Bukharin voiced a high opinion of the German people along with the belief that the Nazi regime would ultimately succumb to internal crisis, and Radek said: "There are magnificent lads in the SA and SS. You'll see, the day will come when they'll be throwing hand grenades for us."<sup>67</sup> The Schlageter line was not forgotten.

Stalin chose the solemn forum of a party congress to make his own pronouncement at long last. Two passages of his main report to the Seventeenth Congress, delivered on January 26, 1934, are noteworthy. First, he said that a new imperialist war was coming and that "it will certainly unleash revolution and place the very existence of capitalism in question in a number of countries as happened during the first imperialist war." And further: "Let not Messrs. bourgeois blame us if, on the day after such a war, certain governments near and dear to them, now ruling safely 'by the grace of God,' turn up missing." Stalin's belief in a new international war as the crucible of Communist revolution is

65. Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, pp. 256–57. Hilger says here that the Russians motivated this action by saying they had a reliable report that Vice-Chancellor von Papen had given the French ambassador in Berlin detailed information on Soviet-German military relations. According to Wollenberg (*The Red Army*, p. 237), two top Soviet generals, Tukhachevskii and Gamarnik, proposed right after Hitler's accession that Red Army-Reichswehr relations be broken off but were turned down because "Stalin did not agree with them."

66. Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, pp. 270–71. On the Tukhachevskii statement see also Laqueur, *Russia and Germany*, p. 164, where a documentary source is given (*Documents on German Foreign Policy*, series C, vol. 2, November 1, 1933, p. 81).

67. Hilger and Meyer, *The Incompatible Allies*, pp. 267–68. This conversation took place at Baum's dacha outside Moscow.

clear. The countries in question were not named. But the logical candidates, as we have seen, were countries in close proximity to the USSR.

The other revealing passage dealt directly with Soviet-German relations. It was not true, Stalin said, what certain German politicians were saying, that because of the rise of German fascism the USSR was now orienting itself on France and Poland and had become a supporter of Versailles. Despite all the Soviet lack of rapture for the German Fascist regime, fascism had nothing to do with it, as shown by the fact that fascism in Italy did not prevent the USSR from having the best of relations with that country. The difficulty (in Soviet-German relations) arose from the change in German policy, from the fact that in the contest between different foreign-policy tendencies going on in Germany a new line reminiscent of the kaiser's anti-Russian one and represented by people like Rosenberg was prevailing over the old line embodied in the Soviet-German treaties. As for the USSR's "supposed reorientation," its sole orientation had been and remained on the USSR alone. "And if the USSR's interests demand rapprochement with these or those countries not concerned to violate peace, we embark upon this course without hesitation."<sup>68</sup>

Subtly yet unambiguously, Stalin was telling Hitler that whenever his government should be disposed to leave Russia in peace and revive the "old line" of Russo-German collaboration, Russia would be ready, in her own interests, to reciprocate. Hitler had referred to common interests between the two states. Stalin was signaling his awareness of them.

In the letter of July 1934 to his Politburo colleagues, recommending against republication of Engels's essay of 1890 in *Bol'shevik's* special issue on the twentieth anniversary of the start of the First World War, Stalin conveyed, just as subtly, the nature of his design. On behalf of revolution Engels was ready to take sides with Germany against tsarist Russia in the impending European war. When war broke out in 1914, Lenin refused to support either side and took the stance of revolutionary defeatism, seeking to turn the war between rival imperialisms into a series of revolutionary civil wars in the belligerent countries, Russia included. In making specific reference to that, Stalin was suggesting that Moscow should maneuver itself into a position of revolutionary (in the sense that it would open a way for armed revolution at a propitious time) noninvolvement in the second imperialist war now impending. Here again he was taking a leaf from Lenin's book, but very much in his own way.

In the present state of knowledge we cannot say when the specifics of the deal concluded with Hitler in 1939 became clear in Stalin's mind. But it is evident from the foregoing that even prior to the Nazi conquest of power, his politics were pointed in that direction.

August 1939 represented the fruition of Stalin's whole complex conception of the means of Soviet survival in a hostile world and emergence into a commanding international position. It embraced the presumption of the inevitability of a great new war: the idea that, through divisive diplomacy in the Lenin tradition, Russia could both help to precipitate the conflict and preserve neutrality during

68. Stalin, 13:294, 297, 302-3.

its earlier stages, allowing the combatants to exhaust themselves while she grew stronger and stronger; and the notion that at some point Russia would be able to take over territories to which she had historical claim and contiguous countries whose ensuing Soviet-guided revolutions would advance the world-revolutionary cause while creating the "socialist encirclement" that would give Russia's revolution the still missing guaranteed security. The ultimate outcome was Stalin's version of the "third treaty" that Lenin had foretold, the one that would be neither a Brest nor a Versailles but "advantageous to us." All the ingredients of the conception were, as we have seen, present in his thinking before events in Germany gave him an opportunity to act upon it.

Between the idea and the execution fell many obstacles. For a long while Hitler proved unreceptive to Moscow's overtures and showed ominous animosity. Stalin's tactics shifted accordingly, but his aim did not. The tortuous path by which he proceeded to his goal can be traced through the history of Soviet diplomacy in the remainder of the 1930s.