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New Asia

When World War II ended in Asia, Japan lay with its back broken, and most of the continent faced profound revolutions. In China, Korea, and Vietnam, the Communist parties had improved their positions immensely during the war, and were ready to contest for power. In Indonesia and India, radical nationalist groups were pushing for full independence from their Dutch and British colonial masters. The continent was hit by a perfect storm: not only was Japan gone as an expansionist great power, but the European empires were breaking down fast as well. For the first time in at least a hundred years Asians would be able to determine their own fate, this time under the banners of nationalism and democracy—concepts first imported from Europe, but given distinct local twists. The new Asian revolutions did not so much look back as forward, toward full autonomy, modernization, and state-building.

The revolutionary storm that hit Asia in the wake of the war had three main currents. The colonial powers and their local allies fought on to keep their positions, or at least keep some of their economic gain, by handing over power to elites with whom they could negotiate. But their front lines were broken; in China all foreign privileges had already been handed back during the war (except in Hong Kong and Macao), and in India the British—as a measure of desperation at a time when Japan was set to invade from the east—had promised autonomy to the country after the war was over. The two new Superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, both opposed colonialism (at least as long as it was not their own) and pushed for rapid and full European withdrawals. Most important of all, no European country could any longer afford to keep its colonial system in place; their populations wanted reconstruction at home, not further expenditure on what seemed futile and morally indefensible positions abroad. Within a decade, colonialism had gone from being the pride of most Europeans to one of their many problems.

Across Asia, nationalist movements were positioning themselves to take power. Most of their leaders combined ideas of a nation, often represented by its past glory, with concepts of modernization and state planning. Many had some form of socialist orientation, though their contacts with the Soviet Union had been limited. In the two biggest countries, China and India, the main nationalist groups (the Chinese National People's Party, or Guomindang, and the Indian National Congress) were large organizations with many factions, both headed by charismatic leaders. Their political orientations were based on state-centered systems of planning under a strong executive, but both confronted the Communist parties within their own borders. In Indonesia—an archipelago of seventeen thousand islands with diverse cultures and histories—the imagined new state was based on an entirely new concept of nation, a national homeland for all indigenous people, with its core in the colony the Dutch had put together in the nineteenth century. The creators of the Indonesian idea were fueled by the notion that in southeast Asia the concepts of being indigenous and being Muslim were identical, and that all southeast Asian Muslims belonged in one united,

centralized state. Just at the time when the Cold War came to dominate international affairs, Asian nationalists saw their new nations breaking through.

In all key Asian countries from Japan to Iran, Communist parties emerged from World War II as the main alternative to the nationalist movements. Ordered by the Comintern to oppose the Japanese in the east, most Communists there had been able to gain patriotic credentials of their own during World War II. But, even so, they were not able to cooperate easily with the more nativist nationalist leaders, in part—ironically—because some nationalists believed the Communists' war efforts had been dictated by Soviet and not national aims. In some places, where the Japanese had been seen as harbingers of an anti-European revolt, the Communists were seen as untrustworthy allies of Asian nationalism. Even so, the Communist parties had expanded everywhere. In China the party claimed to have a million members and a large army under its command. In Indonesia the party was the largest political organization in the country (in spite of its leaders' political incompetence). In India the party dominated the trade unions and had significant influence in the most populous region, Bengal. Even in Japan the party polled more than 10 percent support in the first election after the new constitution. While still minorities, the Communists had reason to believe that they would play a major role in guiding the future destinies of their countries.

The strategic situation in Asia in 1945 is easy to sum up. In the east, US forces had occupied Japan, landed fifty thousand troops in China, and taken control of Korea south of the thirty-eighth parallel. As part of the war, the United States had also landed soldiers on islands in the larger region, from Okinawa to Borneo, and across the Pacific. Britain, with Australian help, had taken over the main cities in southeast Asia from the Japanese. After they finally entered the war against Japan on 9 August 1945, the Soviets had conducted a three-week blitzkrieg, ending up in possession of all of the Chinese northeast (Manchuria), the islands north of Japan, and the northern half of Korea. In the west, Britain and the Soviets had already invaded and occupied Iran in mid-1941, with the Soviets holding the areas north of Tehran. The British were in charge of the rest of the Middle East. It was the imperialist powers that had benefitted the most from the collapse of Japan and Germany, but it was also clear that the British were grossly overextended in 1945. They could not even take effective control of their own former Asian colonies, not to mention independent Asian states or those colonies that had belonged to others. Just like in Europe, Britain needed the cooperation of other powers—predominantly, the United States—to pursue its interests in Asia.

Immediately after 1945, US policy-makers were as preoccupied with parts of Asia as they were with Europe. The United States had, after all, fought World War II because it was attacked by an Asian power. The Americans had had 350,000 casualties in all in the Pacific war, and the sacrifice was not easily forgotten. Twenty thousand of the deaths occurred in the battle for one southern Japanese island, Okinawa, in mid-1945. The future of Japan after capitulation was understandably seen as crucial for the United States, but so was the future of China, whose cause many Americans had felt intimately connected to as an ally during the war. On the western side of the continent, the United States saw Iran as a key state for the years to come; the country had a long border with the Soviet Union and was the most powerful in the oil-rich Persian Gulf region. American leaders believed they could help rescue the Iranians from the clutches of foreign imperialism, British or Soviet, and secure stable oil supplies for its European allies in the process. In addition to historical and strategic reasons for US involvement, US leaders often believed that they could contribute to the political and economic modernization of Asia after the war in ways no European power could or would. If Asia was ripe for revolution, Washington wanted to be at the forefront of it, helping to lead the world's most populous continent in the direction of independence, wealth, and modernity.

The United States was the main ally of the western European countries in the Cold War, and especially

of Britain and France, the two powers that had the largest colonial empires. But colonialism as a principle was not popular in the United States in 1945, since most people saw it as conflicting with the principles of democratic government and with the cause of freedom, in which name the war had been fought. Like its predecessor, the Truman Administration at the end of the Pacific War wanted to see a speedy transfer of power to local elites in Asia, and it was willing to challenge its European allies to reach that aim. But it was not only high principle that led US policy. The Americans also wanted access to market opportunities that colonial preferences had barred them from during the interwar years. And they were fretful about the opportunities that could be given to radicals and Communists if independence for the colonies were too long postponed; the self-centered Europeans, the State Department often argued, could not see the larger Cold War implications of their actions. The universalist heart of the Cold War drove Americans to have strong views on countries and territories that had, only a few years earlier, meant little to Washington.

For the Soviet Union, revolution in Asia meant both opportunities and risks. Lenin had taught that although Marx had been right in putting European revolutions at the center of the overthrow of capitalism, supporting national movements in Asia was a way of putting pressure on the whole imperialist system. Such assistance could thereby hasten the revolutions in Europe that were key both to Soviet security and to the future of humankind. Stalin had taken over this perspective, but with an emphasis on Soviet security. After the lack of international revolutionary success in the interwar years and the searing experience of World War II, Stalin did not want to risk unnecessary confrontations with the United States and Britain over peripheral areas. In 1945, the Soviet leader still hoped that the Soviet Union could reach what he saw as its limited aims in Europe without such conflict. If so, there was no reason to exacerbate tension with his allies over issues that were less important to Soviet foreign policy overall.

But the postwar Soviet leadership also understood that the revolutionary potential in Asia that had been kindled by Japan's collapse could not be overlooked as an element in Soviet foreign affairs. Moscow's role, most of them thought, was to channel this potential in the direction of coalition governments that were anti-Japanese and—at the very least—neutral in the worldwide, long-term conflict between capitalism and socialism. The nascent Communist movements in Asia needed time to build proper organizations, educate cadres, and learn from the USSR. Moscow needed to set aside part of its own meager resources to assist with these processes, many leading Communists argued. But it also needed to spend more time studying the class composition and ideologies of the nationalist and Left-wing parties in Asia in order to avoid making mistakes. With his usual skepticism, Stalin was often on the side of those who argued that the Soviets had to be careful with spending money and materiel on untrustworthy groups and uncertain political prospects in Asia, when so much else was at stake. Based on his reading of Soviet (and Russian) history, the *vozhd*'s view was that there was only one Asian country that really mattered to Moscow in the short run. That country was Japan. And it was there, ironically, that the Soviets seemed to have the least prospect for direct influence when the war ended.

IN AUGUST 1945 Japan was a country in ruins. Its wooden cities had been burned to cinders by American firebombs. In Tokyo less than one-third of the city remained standing, and even that was badly damaged by bombs. Just one B-29 raid, in the night of 9 March 1945, set off a firestorm that killed at least one hundred thousand people, overwhelmingly civilians. The cities in the south, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, had been attacked with nuclear weapons. One hundred twenty thousand were killed instantly, and more died slow and agonizing deaths from radiation. Everywhere infrastructure was in chaos, millions were homeless or living as internal refugees. Then, as the empire collapsed, almost three million Japanese refugees from abroad came to a home country many of them had never seen and where there was little

welcome for them. If there was one thing Japan did not need in 1945 it was more hungry mouths to feed. Food rations were already well below starvation point, lower even than the terrible diet the Japanese had been offered by their own government prior to the collapse.

The Japanese, understandably, blamed their own leaders as much as the foreigners for the disasters that had befallen them. The common people had been promised prosperity, land, and glory; what they got was death and misery. The Japanese people had shown discipline, cohesion, and an immense willingness to sacrifice for what they had been told was the common good during the war. Now, in the fall of 1945, the wages for the loyalty they had shown became clear. A country that had not seen a major war for three hundred years lay devastated. No wonder there were huge demonstrations outside the imperial palace in central Tokyo, with people calling out to the emperor: "What will you have for dinner?" In May 1946 the so-called "Give Us Rice" mass meetings, organized by the leaders of the Japanese Left—most of whom had just emerged from the previous regime's prison camps—demanded "revolutionary changes" and "a democratic government."[1]

The Truman Administration was clear from the outset that it did not want to share postwar control of Japan with any other allied nation. The United States, the president believed, had borne the brunt of the war against Japan and was the only country capable of reforming it (the Chinese would be loath to agree). True, a commission was set up, with pro forma participation by other allies, including Australians and New Zealanders. But power was solely in the hands of the Americans. General Douglas MacArthur, the old soldier who had fought his way back into Asia at the end of the war—against both the Japanese and the staff of the US Department of the Army—had been named Supreme Commander of the Allied Powers, and all authority in the occupied country emanated from his office. MacArthur wanted to see Japan transformed; he believed the country's wartime aggression stemmed from a deep cultural propensity for violence, authoritarianism, and, as he often put it, "ant-like behavior" that separated Japanese from Americans (and from anyone else, for that matter). Japan's polity and economy had to be completely rebuilt, so that barriers could be created for the forms of behavior to which the Japanese were prone, and so that they could be made into reliable allies of the United States in the global conflict with Communism that the general was sure would come.

The radicalism of the reforms that the United States imposed on Japan is often not understood today. The initial postsurrender directive issued by President Truman in August 1945 called for the country to be completely demilitarized, its territory limited to the home islands, and its new constitution written by the occupiers. This constitution would include "the freedoms of religion, assembly, speech, and the press.… The existing economic basis of Japanese military strength must be destroyed.… [The United States would] favor a program for the dissolution of the large industrial and banking combinations… [and encourage] the development of organizations in labor, industry, and agriculture, organized on a democratic basis."[2] MacArthur may have been a very conservative US general, but his orders were to carry out a revolution in Japan, with elements that smacked distinctively of the New Deal policies of the FDR generation.

To the surprise of most Americans, the new freedoms proposed for the Japanese were eagerly seized by the Japanese themselves. As soon as they were allowed to do so, Japanese men and women set up trade unions, self-help organizations, and political groups. Schools and universities began to teach curriculums that emphasized democracy and public participation, very different from the wartime staple of nationalism and emperor-worship. Many saw Japan's old elites as delegitimized by the support they had given to a disastrous policy of expansion. They called themselves nationalists, but had destroyed the nation, many believed. When Truman's advisers on Japan insisted on keeping Emperor Hirohito in place, in spite of his obvious responsibility for waging aggressive war, they claimed that removing him would

make the country ungovernable. But that view was more based on an orientalist sense of Japanese devotion to absolute authority—reinforced, of course, by the experience of fighting the war—than on the rapid changes taking place in postwar Japanese society.

By 1947, the impact of the Cold War had begun to change minds in Washington about the best approach to Japan. The political Left in Japan increased its support from 22 to more than 30 percent of the vote in the April 1947 elections, and although less than 4 percent was for the Communist Party, there was no doubt that political radicalism was increasingly in vogue. Most Japanese believed that the main victors in the war, the Americans and the Soviets, jointly stood for democracy; why else, some Tokyo journalists noted, should the Americans introduce reforms that opened opportunities for the Left? But General MacArthur had already in 1946 issued a stern warning to the increasingly vocal socialists: "If minor elements of Japanese society are unable to exercise such restraint and self-respect as the situation and conditions require, I shall be forced to take the necessary steps to control and remedy such a deplorable situation."[3] George Kennan, visiting in 1948, was struck by how the lack of political stability and economic development in Japan served as a drag on US global policies. He called for a swift end to further reform and a "relaxation" in the purge of wartime perpetrators. He also called for a "limited re-militarization of Japan" if the Soviets were not "extensively weakened and sobered" or "Japanese society still seems excessively vulnerable in the political sense" by the time of a peace treaty.[4]

The so-called "reverse course" by the Americans gave Japanese conservatives back some of their self-confidence. They could build on a Japanese society in which the majority was becoming increasingly preoccupied with stemming economic decline. The leaders of the Right seemed to have the better skills to get factories going again, and to organize supplies of rice to the cities. Those few on the Right who had fallen out with the wartime militarists proved especially popular. Yoshida Shigeru, a former diplomat who had been arrested for trying to force an early Japanese surrender, became prime minister in 1946 and stayed on for most of the time until 1954, though strongly challenged by the Left. From late 1948 thousands of Left-wing teachers, civil servants, and trade unionists were thrown out of work in a reverse "Red purge." That their own people were blacklisted when those who had been charged with war crimes now walked free: this infuriated and radicalized the Japanese Left. In the 1949 elections the Communists got more than 10 percent of the vote.

The occupation of Japan gave the United States a unique opportunity to shape a former enemy into a long-term auxiliary. Both the period of reform and the antiradical policies that followed were aimed at the same purpose: to refashion Japan in the American image. It was, of course, the US military victory in the Pacific War that made this possible. But it was also dependent on shutting out the other victorious powers—and chiefly the Soviet Union—from any real role in the occupation that followed. Stalin was angry at the brazen exclusion of his country from the occupation force, but he was not surprised. It was, after all, the kind of behavior he himself had shown in eastern Europe. And he did not expect Truman to do him any favors. Stalin's policy was to instruct the Japanese Communist party to oppose the US occupation and to argue that only a Japanese socialist revolution and an alliance with the Soviet Union could resurrect Japanese independence. But he also held out a hand to Japanese conservatives: if they wanted back the northern Kuril Islands, which the USSR had occupied at the end of the war, and if they wanted to trade with Communist China, then the road to such settlements went through Moscow.

The Communist victory in China and the outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950 changed the strategic situation in eastern Asia. Before, Japan had been an asset to the United States primarily because of its long-term economic (and possibly military) potential. After the North Korean attack, especially, Japan was all the United States had in the region, and the country played a key role in staging and supplying the US Army's counteroffensive in Korea. The war made Washington decide to enter into a

peace treaty with Japan as soon as possible, so that the US got a permanent foothold in Japan, and Japan assumed some of the responsibility for its own defense. Truman insisted that the Japanese government first agree to a bilateral security treaty with the United States, which committed Tokyo to have the Americans as their only ally and gave Washington the right to bases in Japan entirely outside the local government's purview. US forces, said the treaty, would contribute to "the security of Japan against armed attack from without, including assistance given at the express request of the Japanese government to put down large-scale internal riots and disturbances in Japan."[5] Yoshida also had to declare that Japan would not enter into any agreements with the Chinese Communist government. Only then could the peace treaty be signed. The Soviets, predictably, refused to sign it, and China was not even invited to the meeting.

Over time, Japan would develop into the most important US ally for fighting the Cold War. Not only did it serve as an unsinkable aircraft carrier off the coast of mainland Asia, but it was also in the late 1940s already central to US military planning, which assumed an offshore strategy for US military predominance in the region. Later, the most important part of the US-Japanese alliance was to become the economic interaction and support Tokyo provided for US Cold War strategies. But in the first years of the alliance, this was still in the future. As Asia became an evermore important part of US foreign policy, the main American concerns remained over the stability of the Japanese political system and Tokyo's willingness to defend itself against Communism, foreign or domestic.

FOR MOST CHINESE the twentieth century had been a topsy-turvy experience. Their country had gone from being an empire in the early century to becoming a republic, to becoming an anarchic collection of competing regimes, to becoming a republic again. The latest incarnation of the Chinese state, from the 1930s on, was a modernizing dictatorship led by Chiang Kai-shek and his National People's Party, the Guomindang. But the Japanese attack in 1937 had challenged Chiang's hold on power, and allowed his domestic competitors to reemerge. While the Guomindang was fighting for its life (and China's) against the Japanese onslaught, these competitors had been gaining ground. First among them was the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which Chiang had been able to drive almost out of existence by the mid-1930s. Without much direct contact with Moscow, the CCP had been able to transform itself during the war into a significant national party. Fighting the Japanese when it had to and the Guomindang when an opportunity arose, the CCP in 1945 stood ready to wrestle with Chiang's Nationalists for the leadership of China.

The war against Japan had offered the Chinese Communists their opportunity to flourish. But it was their leader, Mao Zedong, who made sure that they gripped that opportunity to gain power. Mao was a brilliant, swashbuckling commander with a strong commitment to social justice and a deep hatred for "old China" as he saw it—backwardness, superstition, and patriarchy. He wanted to create a "new China," which was modern and socially just at the same time. His main ideal was Stalin's Soviet Union, a country he had never visited but which he idolized as anti-imperialist, revolutionary, and progressive. By early 1945, Mao's forces were ready to link up with the Red Army in north China, as part of a Soviet intervention that they expected to come soon, and thereafter to challenge Chiang Kai-shek for supremacy.

But the end of the war in China came in ways neither Mao nor his opponents had expected. Stalin hesitated in attacking Japan for so long that Mao was close to despair. The CCP was forced to begin contemplating a postwar China in which the United States was the predominant foreign power, a scenario most definitely not to its liking. Then, in August 1945, everything happened at once. Atomic bombs fell on Japanese cities. The Soviet Union finally attacked Japan and occupied northeast China, also known as Manchuria, and the northern part of Korea. Japan capitulated. All of a sudden the power that had driven China to the edge of extinction was no more. Mao ordered Chinese Communist forces into Manchuria to grab as much territory from the humbled Japanese as they could. His party seemed poised for major

successes.

Then everything went wrong for the Chinese Communists. The Americans ordered the Japanese, who still held vast areas of China, to surrender *only* to Chiang's forces. Using his status as the head of China's internationally recognized government, Chiang negotiated a deal with Stalin, in which the Guomindang was given control of Manchuria in return for concessions to the Soviets for future economic and military activities there. Even worse, the Chinese living along the eastern seaboard—the most populous regions of the country, which had been occupied by Japan during the war—welcomed Chiang's forces back as liberating heroes when they arrived aboard American transport planes. Mao seemed set to lose on most counts.

The Chinese Communists obviously would not take this lying down. Ignoring Soviet orders, Communist soldiers made their way into Manchuria anyway. As tension mounted in the fall of 1945, President Truman sent America's number one wartime hero, General George C. Marshall, to mediate in China. Stalin at first asked the CCP to cooperate with the mediation, for two main reasons: the Soviet leader saw no chance for a successful Communist revolution in China, and he needed Chiang's continued cooperation in order to make use of the concessions he had wrestled from China earlier in the year. Stalin's thinking was not so much about sacrificing revolution in China for Soviet gain as it was about getting some advantages for the Soviet Union (and therefore for Communism) instead of getting no advantages. But the CCP would not cooperate. As the party refused to give way to Chiang, military clashes intensified. The Americans increasingly threw their weight behind the Chinese president, who—emboldened—dragged his feet on implementing China's agreement with the Soviets. With American pressure mounting, and Cold War tensions erupting elsewhere, Stalin abruptly decided to withdraw his forces from Manchuria in March 1946, probably knowing that by doing so he threw the military advantage in the region to the Chinese Communists. He may have thought that this would force Chiang back to the negotiating table. Instead it set off a civil war that engulfed all of China for the next four years.

Chiang Kai-shek was hell-bent on dislocating the CCP from Manchuria. His mission was to unite the country under his leadership, and to resurrect it as a political and military great power. In order to do so, he thought, the CCP had to be crushed. His all-out US-assisted offensive against the Communists in late 1946 and 1947 came close to succeeding. But then he and his party overreached. With increasing Soviet support, the Communist troops—now reconstituted as the People's Liberation Army (PLA)—began attacking Nationalist supply lines in Manchuria. While Chiang continued to pour his best, US-equipped troops into the region, the military equation there slowly changed. By late 1947 PLA marshal Lin Biao's troops began an overall offensive. In early 1948 the Guomindang's main forces were trapped in the northeast, to be picked off one by one by the PLA. The war started to go badly for Chiang Kai-shek.

While Chiang got into trouble on the battlefield, he also began weakening his own position in the cities and in other areas controlled by his government. Chiang was a man in a hurry. He wanted too much too fast. First and foremost he wanted to build a strong central government, which could guide and fund an economic and social revival for China. Instead, his precipitous actions hurried the downfall of his regime. By mid-1948 the peasantry deserted him because they resented seeing their sons press-ganged into the army for a cause that seemed increasingly hopeless. The landowners gave up on the Guomindang because Chiang seemed intent on bringing his own men into their provinces to rule them. The bourgeoisie turned against the government because it drove them into penury through inflation and corruption. The working class in the cities—among whom the Guomindang had some support and the CCP none—was the last group to run away from the regime, but in 1949, when the CCP armies overran all of China, few workers came forward to die for the Nationalists.

The Truman Administration—never keen on Chiang's government to begin with, but much preferring it

over the Communists—also abandoned its wartime ally. Already in 1948 the president's advisers made it clear that there was no way in which the Nationalists could win, except through a direct US military intervention. And under pressure elsewhere, especially in Europe, there was no way the US president would sanction a landing of US troops to fight in a civil war in mainland Asia, even if he believed such a war to be winnable. George Marshall, now back in Washington as secretary of state, had warned both Chinese and Americans that simply resupplying Chiang's armies would not do the job. Chiang is faced "with a unique problem of logistics," Marshall coldly told the Chinese ambassador Wellington Koo. "He is losing about 40 percent of his supplies to the enemy. If the percentage should reach 50, he will have to decide whether it is wise to supply his own troops."[6]

While the Americans distanced themselves from Chiang, though never cutting him off fully, the Soviets drew closer to the CCP. By early 1948 Soviet military aid was coming into Manchuria, and Red Army instructors trained PLA officers both there and in the Soviet Union. It is likely that the PLA would have won the civil war even without Red Army assistance. But Soviet aid was politically important to the CCP. It proved that the "great master" of Communism in Moscow, Joseph Stalin himself, now accepted the party's policies, and that he would help a new Chinese Communist state come into existence.

While Chiang Kai-shek fled to Taiwan, the island off China's coast that had been under Japanese direct rule since the late nineteenth century, Mao in October 1949 set up a new government in Beijing. In spite of Soviet appeals for caution, Mao declared it a People's Republic, like the Soviet satellite states in eastern Europe. He also insisted on setting out on a pilgrimage to Moscow right after the new People's Republic of China (PRC) was declared, ostensibly to help celebrate Stalin's seventieth birthday. In reality, what Mao wanted was an alliance with the USSR against US attempts at undermining his revolution. The great master grudgingly permitted it. Stalin did not trust the "class-basis" of the Chinese Communists. They were peasants, he concluded, rather than workers. Theirs was a "national" rather than a socialist revolution, and they should govern in alliance with the national bourgeoisie, at least to begin with. Deeper down Stalin distrusted the CCP for coming to power on its own rather than being dependent on the Soviet Red Army. As he grew older, he increasingly suspected anything and anyone he could not directly control. Mao got his alliance but was not happy about being treated as a curiosity rather than as the great master's foremost disciple, which he so much wanted to be.

The new state the CCP set out to build was formed in the Soviet image. The party pretended that their government was a coalition, mainly to please Stalin and the Soviet advisers. But its new constitution highlighted the leading role of the CCP and lauded the "indestructible friendship with the great Union of Soviet Socialist Republics." In reality there was no doubt: the CCP ruled China, and it set out to purge those who might disagree with its way forward. "We stand for the dictatorship of the proletariat and peasantry under the leadership of the Communist Party, for a people's dictatorship, because workers and peasants make up 90% of China's population," Mao told the Soviets. "Such a regime will provide democracy for the people and dictatorship for the landlords, bureaucratic capital, and imperialists. We call our regime a new democracy, based on the union of workers and peasants under the leadership of the proletariat, represented by its vanguard, the Communist Party."[7]

The revolutionary violence that the new regime unleashed on China had three main purposes. Mao wanted to break the power of the traditional elite in the countryside and the bourgeoisie in the cities. He wanted to insulate China from non-Communist foreign influence by driving out foreigners and banning their newspapers, books, and films. And he wanted to mobilize China's youth, through mass campaigns, to build a new socialist republic patterned on the Soviet Union. The outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950 may have made these purges bloodier than they otherwise might have become. But all the key elements were there from the beginning, borrowed straight from Stalin's campaigns of the 1930s in

the Soviet Union, not least the province-wide quotas of how many counterrevolutionaries had to be found and eliminated. Almost two million people were killed in the first two years of CCP rule, even as the Soviet advisers warned against rashness.[8]

In spite of the brutal and often meaningless crimes of the new regime, Chinese did flock to its banner in large numbers. Many believed Mao's version, that after hundred years of weakness, the Chinese people had finally stood up. Nationalism was the order of the day, and so many Chinese desperately wanted a country they could be proud of. If Communism was the wave of the future, then China would have to accept it, or even be at the forefront of it, they thought. Fighting the war in Korea against the United States helped fuel Chinese nationalism. But Mao's project, and the stories he told about how all of China's past pointed toward this moment of Communist victory, also had a more profound appeal. It fitted with the image of collective action and collective justice that leaders had been fond of promulgating for much of Chinese history. To some, who felt that they had let their country down through wars and confrontations in the first half of the twentieth century, the Communist revolution was a kind of cleansing: it might have used methods that were incomprehensible or even inhuman, but the revolution gave them the opportunity to immerse themselves in something bigger than the individual, something meaningful, something that would, eventually, set China right.

The power of the Chinese revolution was felt far outside the borders of China itself. In southeast Asia, anticolonial revolutionary parties were encouraged and emboldened. In Korea, Kim Il-sung's Communists felt that they, too, could now reunify their country by force. Even in Japan, where elites had regarded Chinese Communism as a deadly threat, nationalists secretly rejoiced at seeing Asians taking power by themselves, in spite of US opposition. Among Chinese diasporas, many who had had little affinity with Communism celebrated the advent of a strong government in China.[9] In India and in Europe, the Chinese revolution was seen as a major shift in world politics. The nationalist prime minister of newly independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru, told his parliament that "it was a basic revolution involving millions and millions of human beings…, [which] produced a perfectly stable government, strongly entrenched and popular."[10] French newspaper editorials—across the political spectrum—commented on the swiftness of the transition and how it strengthened Communism as an ideology everywhere. In *Le Figaro*, the French anti-Communist intellectual Raymond Aron observed, with much portent, that "the conquest of the former Chinese Empire by a revolutionary party professing an ideology of Western origin, which has now become the official religion of a Eurasian empire, constitutes a historic event, paradoxical at first sight and still unpredictable in its consequences.… The example of China, after that of Russia, shows that Marxism, created by Marx for post-capitalist societies, has a better chance of success in pre-capitalist societies."[11]

In the United States the overall reaction was more one of profound shock. Since the early part of the twentieth century, the few Americans who were preoccupied with such matters had seen their country as a benevolent guide for China, helping and assisting the country as it entered the world stage. This view had reached its zenith during World War II when the United States and China had been allies, fighting the Japanese together, in order—interested Americans thought—to free China and enable it to join the United States as a obliging world power. Franklin Roosevelt had often spoken of China as one of the future "world policemen," around which the United Nations system should be based. Now US dreams and investments seemed to be in tatters. But instead of blaming their own foreign policy, many US officials found that the Chinese were to blame. They were seen as ungrateful and devious, spurning generations of US assistance for them.

The Cold War implications of the Communist takeover in China were immediately visible to the Truman Administration. China had joined the Soviet Union in an alliance directed against the United

States. While there were some who believed nationalist pressures eventually would drive the alliance apart, the majority view was one of alarm, dismay, and betrayal. The Korean War of course intensified the loathing of the Chinese Communists; Truman noted in 1951 that "as long as I am president, if I can prevent it, that cut-throat organization will never be recognized by us as the government of China."[12] But even before the outbreak of war in Korea, NSC-68 had warned that "the Communist success in China, taken with the politico-economic situation in the rest of South and South-East Asia, provides a springboard for a further incursion in this troubled area."[13]

The alarmism of the Truman Administration was not enough for the president's critics. By the late 1940s, most Republicans had shed their isolationist image and become ardent Cold Warriors, accusing Truman of being soft on Communism abroad and at home. The US "loss of China" provided them with ammunition. As Truman sought Congressional funding for his Cold War doctrine in Europe, first-term Republican congressman Richard Nixon made the case for a global Communist threat, which he believed the Democratic Administration had ignored: "What is the difference between the spread of Communism in China and Red influences in the eastern Mediterranean?… [Are we] going to make the same mistake as we did in China by sending pinks and fellow-travellers to fight Communism and sabotage our announced program? And, if we are going to combat Communism in Greece and Turkey, should we not also clean house here at home and remove Communists and fellow-travellers from positions of power in our governmental departments and labor unions?"[14] Linking up with Joe McCarthy, whom he joined in the US Senate in 1950, Nixon charged the Democrats with the United States losing China to the Communists.[15]

AS NORTHEAST ASIA was being transformed through war, occupation, and revolution, southeast Asia was going through its own transfiguration. Unlike the region to its north, almost all of southeast Asia had been colonized by outside powers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Indochina had come under French control, while most of the southern archipelago had been taken over by the Dutch. The British ruled Malaya and Burma. The Americans—latecomer imperialists—had taken possession of the Philippines. Only Thailand remained precariously independent. But in the first few years after 1945 this established order was turned upside down. The veteran Communist Ho Chi Minh declared Vietnam's independence in August 1945. The same month, the radical nationalist Sukarno proclaimed the new sovereign state of Indonesia, covering all the territory the Dutch had colonized. In Burma, Aung San negotiated a British withdrawal in January 1947. Both Sukarno and Aung San had collaborated with the Japanese. Aung San, a former Communist and leader of an intensely nationalist group, had set up the Burma National Army in Japan, and only switched sides in March 1945, when he constructed the abundantly named Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, together with the Burmese Communist Party. Sukarno had launched his five principles for the new Indonesian state—nationhood, internationalism, democracy, socialism, and faith—in Japanese-occupied Jakarta, and worked with the Japanese until they capitulated. He then set about constructing a new country, irrespective of Dutch designs on returning to their colony after the collapse of Japan.

But there was to be no easy way to independence and nationhood, as the Indonesian example shows. After the Japanese surrender, British forces occupied the main Indonesian cities. London decided to let the Dutch take back their former colony. Indonesian resistance grew, culminating in the battle of Surabaya in November 1945. Six hundred British soldiers, including their commander, Brigadier Aubertin Mallaby, died for the Dutch right to return. More than nine thousand Indonesians were killed. Surabaya was a reminder both to the British and the Americans of the strength of southeast Asian nationalism, and they urged the Netherlands to settle for a loose affiliation with Indonesia. When the Dutch in 1947 attempted to overthrow the young republic by force, the British refused to support them, and the Americans were

caught in a quandary. They were afraid that forcing a Dutch withdrawal from southeast Asia would weaken the government in the Netherlands itself and provoke social and economic instability there. But they were even more worried that the longer the Dutch "police operation" in its former colony went on, the more would nationalists such as Sukarno have to give way to the policies of the powerful Indonesian Communist Party. In the end, the Indonesian Communists solved the US policy dilemma by launching an ill-fated armed uprising against the leaders of the Indonesian republic. When the Dutch tried to make use of the chaos on the Indonesian side to reinforce its intervention and arrest some of the Indonesian leaders, the Truman Administration put its foot down. While threatening to cut off economic aid to the Netherlands, Washington supported a UN Security Council resolution demanding that the Indonesian republic's leadership be reinstated. The Dutch agreed to give Indonesia independence by the end of the year.

The saga of Indonesian sovereignty shows two important links from the Cold War to a rapidly decolonizing world. The first is that in most places outside of China and its immediate neighbors, Communist parties were no match for more popular and better-organized nationalists. And China itself may have been an exception simply because the Japanese had already done so much damage to the Communists' enemies, the Guomindang under Chiang Kai-shek. The second is that the United States, generally, was more preoccupied with preventing Communist gains than with supporting its western European allies in retaking their former colonies. When a US Administration became convinced that the latter stood in the way of the former, it would act even against its own allies. The problem, as the Cold War progressed, was that in ideological terms it became harder and harder for US political leaders to distinguish between radical nationalism and Communism. Both were seen as anti-American, and the policies of radical nationalists were believed to pave the way for the Communists (in spite of much evidence to the contrary).

Vietnam was, with the possible exception of Korea, the only former Asian colony where Communism was the choice of the predominant pro-independence leaders. One reason, ironically, was the integration of Vietnamese elites into French culture and education, from whence the post-1914 generation took over the radicalization that was prevalent among French youth, too. The internationalism of Soviet Communism appealed to many in the Vietnamese independence movement. It gave them a chance to show why and how their struggle for self-rule was of global importance, on par with what was happening in France itself. Ho Chi Minh, the key leader connecting Vietnam to the Cold War, also symbolized this link between Vietnamese nationalism and Communist internationalism. Ho was born in 1890 and attended a French lycée in Hue. Fascinated by the world outside of Vietnam, Ho traveled to France, Britain, and the United States, where he worked in menial jobs—among them as a waiter at the Carlton Hotel in London—and studied in his free time. Having campaigned unsuccessfully for Vietnam's independence at the Versailles conferences after World War I, he became a founding member of the French Communist Party and went on to work for the Communist International, the Comintern, in Moscow and then in China and southeast Asia from 1923 to 1941. Only then did he return to Vietnam, where he sensed that France's defeat in World War II provided an opportunity to break his country free from colonial rule. Ho and the organization he headed, the Viet Minh, short for the League for the Independence of Vietnam, fought the Vichy French and the Japanese, never trusting Tokyo's promises of postwar independence for Vietnam and following instructions from Moscow to put pressure on the Japanese Imperial Army.

When the Japanese suddenly capitulated in August 1945, Ho, like Sukarno, immediately struck for Vietnamese independence. In an attempt to build on wartime Great Power cooperation and avoid US support for his enemies, Ho put his declaration into an international perspective: "'All men are created equal. They are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.' This immortal statement was made in the Declaration of Independence of

the United States of America in 1776. In a broader sense, this means: All the peoples on the earth are equal from birth, all the peoples have a right to live, to be happy and free." Like Mao in China, Ho believed that the Communist revolution in Vietnam, which would follow the Viet Minh's taking of power under Communist leadership, could only be prevented by US intervention against them. Ho may have thought about parallels from the French history he had studied. If Paris was well worth a mass for the Protestant king Henry IV, then the Vietnamese revolution could well be worth a quotation from the Declaration of Independence by the Communist Ho Chi Minh.

If it had not been for the French determination to return to Vietnam after the war, Ho may well have been right. One key reason why the United States did get involved in matters in Vietnam (and the rest of Indochina) was that the French forces continued to fight Ho's Viet Minh until the Korean War broke out. At first, Washington took a dim view of the French recolonization of Indochina, even though successive French governments were hard at work trying to convince Truman that the fighting there was a conflict between Communism and "the Free World." But with the war in Korea raging, and with Chinese Communist support for the Viet Minh becoming increasingly evident, neither Truman nor Eisenhower who succeeded him felt that handing Vietnam over to Ho Chi Minh was a defensible proposition. The problem was that the battles in the north of Vietnam were increasingly going against the French, and in May 1954 they suffered a massive defeat at Dien Bien Phu, attacked jointly by Viet Minh fighters and Chinese heavy artillery.[16]

For the new Eisenhower Administration, Dien Bien Phu was a massive problem in Cold War terms. The United States had supported France both directly and indirectly during the outdrawn battle. It had supplied weapons and aircraft to the French, and toward the end, two US Air Force squadrons of B-26 bombers had attacked Vietnamese targets around the battle area. Still, the French had lost, the government in Paris had collapsed as a result, and Pierre Mendès-France, the new Left-leaning French premier, wanted to withdraw from Indochina as soon as possible. Eisenhower refused to put US soldiers on the ground. "Any nation that intervenes in a civil war can scarcely expect to win unless the side in whose favor it intervenes possesses a high morale based upon a war purpose or cause in which it believes," the president said. In private, he criticized the French, accusing them of having used "weasel words in promising independence and through this one reason as much as anything else, have suffered reverses that have been really inexcusable."[17] But he also warned against letting the Communists come to power in Vietnam. "You have the specific value of a locality in its production of materials that the world needs," Eisenhower told reporters as the 1954 international conference on Indochina was gathering. "Then you have the possibility that many human beings pass under a dictatorship that is inimical to the free world. Finally, you have broader considerations that might follow what you would call the 'falling domino' principle. You have a row of dominoes set up, you knock over the first one, and what will happen to the last one is the certainty that it will go over very quickly. So you could have a beginning of a disintegration that would have the most profound influences."[18]

Another possible domino that both Truman and Eisenhower worried about was India. Washington had generally applauded British prime minister Attlee's decision—imposed on him by a deteriorating economy at home and expanding protests against British rule—to grant India early independence after World War II. Far better, Truman thought, to hand over to Indian nationalists than wait for conditions favoring the Communists to grow. But the Americans were also, from the beginning of independence in 1947, skeptical of the political orientation of some of India's leaders, and especially of the predominant party, the Indian National Congress. "He just doesn't like white men," Truman complained after having met Nehru the first time.[19]

For Nehru, his US problem was far bigger than the Americans' India problem. The Indian National

Congress, which he represented, was an anticolonial movement, founded in 1885, which aimed at Indian independence, anti-imperialism, and Asian solidarity. Its thinking about social and economic development was distinctly socialist; Congress believed in centralized planning and a state-led economy, and its main political aim was to abolish India's terrifying rural poverty. Nehru himself combined the feeling of superiority a Cambridge education had left in him with a deep sense of social justice and national purpose. He also believed firmly that Asian leaders had to stand together to abolish colonialism and take responsibility for global affairs. Although never attracted by Communism as an ideology, Nehru and many of his colleagues had a long-standing fascination with Soviet development models, which they regarded as more appropriate for India than any form of capitalism. From the very beginning of his tenure as prime minister, Nehru viewed the United States as an impatient and immature Superpower with a missionary zeal, and as a potential troublemaker for postcolonial Asia.

Nehru's view of a benign India ready to take its position on the world stage had been severely dented by the violence surrounding his country's independence from Britain. As it became clear that parts of India's Muslim minority would break away and form their own state, Pakistan, on the country's western and eastern borders, masses of refugees started to move in either direction. Seventeen million were displaced and at least half a million died as a result of interethnic violence. In Punjab, especially, defenseless refugees—Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs—were attacked by mobs from outside their own religious communities. Rape was common. The relationship between India and Pakistan was poisoned as a result, and the other countries that came out of British decolonization in south Asia—Burma, Nepal, Bhutan, and Ceylon (now Sri Lanka)—all looked with suspicion at the behavior of their big neighbor India. Nehru's Congress government was born into a difficult foreign policy region.

Eisenhower worried about India's allegiance in Cold War terms, though he was wary of spending too much on foreign aid to that country. The State Department appealed for increased funding for India. "There is no time to lose," said the department's Office of South Asian Affairs in 1952. "Communist gains in the recent elections in India show clearly that the conditions our program is designed to combat are being successfully exploited by Communist agents.… [i]f South Asia is subverted it will be only a matter of time before all of the Asian land-mass and over a billion people will be under Communist domination, and our national security will face an unprecedented threat."[20] US aid to India (and to its neighbors) did gradually increase. But the political relationship between the two giant countries—both democratic heirs to a British political culture—showed few signs of improving.

Further west in Asia, matters were threatening to develop in an even more negative direction for the United States. Since World War II Washington had been preoccupied with securing oil supplies from the Middle East to its allies in Europe and east Asia. French and British decolonization in the region threatened to create the kind of political instability that could upset such supplies, which the Cold War had made even more significant. Still, the Truman Administration was hopeful that power could be handed over to moderate nationalists, mostly from the local royal families, who could be depended upon to fight Communism and continue to work with foreign oil companies to deliver oil. Saudi Arabia promised such cooperation, as did Iraq, both led by conservative monarchs. But although both Syria and Egypt seemed to be moving in a pro-western direction, the conflict in Palestine threatened to undo US aims in the Middle East. Like Muslims in Pakistan had done the year before, Jews in Palestine in 1948 declared their own state, after a vote in the UN General Assembly recommended the partition of the territory, which both the United States and the USSR had voted in favor of. Truman argued, against most of his foreign policy advisers, that early recognition of Israel was necessary both for Cold War and domestic political reasons. The president's preference had been for a federated or binational Palestine. In a diatribe in his personal diary, he wrote, "The Jews, I find are very, very selfish. They care not how

many… get murdered or mistreated, as long as the Jews get special treatment. Yet when they have power, physical, financial or political neither Hitler nor Stalin has anything on them for cruelty or mistreatment to the underdog."[21] But in spite of his anti-Semitic attitudes, he worried that not recognizing Israel would open it up for Soviet influence and cost him votes in the presidential election in the fall.

As soon as Israel was declared in May 1948 the country was attacked by armies from the Arab states. The civil war in Palestine became an international war, which Israel won. It took control of much of the territory that according to the partition plan should have gone to Palestinian Arabs, while Jordan and Egypt took over the Palestinian West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian civil war thereby became a permanent affliction in international affairs, which would have a major influence on the Cold War. It also soon brought the Cold War directly into the Middle East, as both Israelis and Arabs were looking for allies in their conflict with each other. Of course, the Cold War in the Middle East was about more than the Palestinian issue. But the permanence of that conflict did make it an unavoidable aspect of all foreign involvement in the region.

In 1945, though, the biggest concern in the Muslim world for both Superpowers was Iran. After the German attack on the Soviet Union in 1941, the Soviets and the British had occupied Iran in order to prevent any possible cooperation between Germany and Iranian nationalists. A major aim was to keep control of the Iranian oil production, through the monopoly of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC; later British Petroleum, or BP). The occupation further alienated the majority of Iranians, and gave the Soviets the opportunity to support Azeri and Kurdish separatist movements in their northern occupation zone against the central government in Tehran. Having secured agreement for the continuation of the AIOC monopoly, the British withdrew their forces by early spring 1946. But, much like he did in China, Stalin decided to hold out for a better deal with the Iranians. Meanwhile, Azeris and Kurds declared their own autonomous republics in northern Iran, with Soviet support.

US and British attempts at forcing the USSR to withdraw from Iran in the spring of 1946 constituted one of the first Cold War crises. "Tell Stalin that I had always held him to be a man to keep his word. Troops in Iran after Mar[ch] 2 upset that theory," Truman instructed his Soviet ambassador when the Red Army had not withdrawn by the UN deadline. The ambassador delivered the warning, adding that "it would be misinterpreting the character of the United States to assume that because we are basically peaceful and deeply interested in world security, we are either divided, weak or unwilling to face our responsibilities. If the people of the United States were ever to become convinced that we are faced with a wave of progressive aggression on the part of any powerful nation or group of nations, we would react exactly as we have in the past."[22] Stalin was furious. When the Iranian prime minister, the nationalist Ahmad Qavam, held out against Soviet demands for economic agreements, the Soviet leader ordered his diplomats "to wrench concessions from Qavam, to give him support, to isolate the Anglophiles, thus, and to create some basis for the further democratization of Iran."[23] Stalin's contradictory orders did little good for Soviet diplomacy. When the Red Army did withdraw, under US pressure, in May 1946, Qavam lost no time in breaking every promise he had given to the Soviets. In December 1946 Iranian troops took control of the north, and the Azeri and Kurdish leaders who did not escape to the Soviet Union were publicly executed. The Iranian Communist Party, the Tudeh—the biggest Communist group in the Middle East—suffered a setback from which it was hard to recover.

In Iran, as elsewhere in Asia, Soviet policy was riddled with contradictions. Stalin wanted to support the Communist parties, but did not in a single case believe that they were ready to carry out revolutions on their own. When he was proven wrong, as in China, he spent more time worrying about the "real"—meaning potentially discordant—content of these massive political transformations than designing plans

for their further development. But he also wanted to exploit Soviet power to get material advantages from Asian states. In part because he suspected their revolutions were bourgeois nationalist, rather than socialist, he pushed so hard for such concessions that he put the local Communists on the defensive. It was not easy to explain to the population in Iran that the Communists were against all foreign oil concessions, except the Soviet ones. Or for Mao Zedong to explain to the Chinese that the Soviet comrades wanted to keep special privileges for themselves in China's northern provinces.

In some cases the Soviet Union seemed more preoccupied with acting as a spoiler to US or British interests than developing a long-term policy of its own. The recognition of Israel is a case in point. In spite of his own deep-seated and escalating anti-Semitism, Stalin believed that it was more important to create difficulties for Britain's position in the Middle East than to stick with the earlier Soviet policy of creating a secular unified state in Palestine. In his instructions, the Soviet UN ambassador Andrei Vyshinskii—who may have wondered what was going on in Moscow—was told not to be "alarmed by a large minority of Arabs in the Jewish state, provided that it is less than 50 percent. This situation will not threaten the existence of an independent Jewish state, since the Jewish element in the state will inevitably increase."[24] Stalin's views on the Cold War played a key role in the creation of the state of Israel, in ways that the Soviets would soon regret.

Still, what mattered more in Asia was the Soviet model for development, rather than Stalin's foreign policy initiatives. From China to Israel, ruling parties were influenced by what they saw as Soviet achievements with regard to economic and social progress. State planning, national industries, and collective agriculture played a key role in government programs all over Asia. As we have seen, such policies were not foreign to western European governments either, at least not during the initial phase of postwar reconstruction. But in the new, postcolonial Asia the inspiration was more often taken directly from the Soviet experience. While deploring its lack of freedom, Nehru praised the Soviet Union for having "advanced human society by a great leap," citing its achievements "in education and culture and medical care and physical fitness and in the solution of the problem of nationalities—by the amazing and prodigious effort to create a new world out of the dregs of the old."[25] Nehru quoted the Indian poet and Nobel Prize winner Rabindranath Tagore, who in his deathbed message lauded "the unsparing energy with which Russia has tried to fight disease and illiteracy, and has succeeded in steadily liquidating ignorance and poverty, wiping off the humiliation from the face of a vast continent. Her civilization is free from all invidious distinction between one class and another, between one sect and another. The rapid and astounding progress achieved by her made me happy and jealous at the same time."[26]

The United States was as hesitant as the Soviet Union when approaching the new Asia, but even more bound by links to the European colonial past. Ironically, for a country that often highlighted its own anticolonial heritage, postwar US Administrations mostly failed to prioritize anticolonialism over Cold War concerns. And even when it did push European powers toward decolonization, as with the Netherlands in the case of Indonesia, it was mainly because the assumed Cold War consequences of not doing so were greater than their opposite. This failure of imagination had many reasons. The sense of a racial hierarchy, in which Europeans were at the top, influenced US policy-making. Concepts of religion likewise: those who believed in Christianity, both in Europe as well as Asian converts, ought to be defended against those who did not. And economic interest played a role, though increasingly as a systemic concern. Washington wanted to promote access to raw materials and future markets for the United States and its allies. In Asia as in Europe, US policy in the early Cold War was more oriented toward the expansion of capitalism as such than toward a unique preservation of US national economic advantage or the interests of specific US companies.

By the end of the Chinese civil war, if not before, both the US government and its critics at home subsumed all other concerns in Asia to the exigencies of the Cold War. The future in Asia did not look bright to most American leaders. Before the Korean War and well before his campaign for the presidency, General Eisenhower had noted to himself that "Asia is lost with Japan, P[hilippine] I[slands], N[etherlands] E[ast] I[ndies] and even Australia under threat. India itself is not safe!"[27] The fear of the consequences of a Viet Minh victory in Vietnam came out of such apocalyptic Cold War concerns. So did the decision to intervene in Korea, though Korea also gave the Americans a chance to strike back against what they saw as a pattern of Soviet aggression everywhere. The Korean War combined Superpower confrontation with Asian nationalism. It was an Asian civil war, but also the biggest campaign of the Cold War.