THIRD EDITION

THE COLD WAR

A Post-Cold War History

Ralph B. Levering

WILEY Blackwell

The Cold War

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The Cold War

A Post-Cold War History

Third Edition

Ralph B. Levering

WILEY Blackwell

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To Patty

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Photo Essay: The Cold War at Midpassage, 1957–1973

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Preface and Acknowledgments

Why, one may ask, should today's college-level students be assigned a book on the history of the Cold War and the role of the United States in it?

The answer is: more than ever before, we live in a globalized world, and the Cold War, which lasted from the end of World War II to 1990, was one of the three most important developments in the second half of twentieth-century history—all of which shaped the nation as well as the world in which we live today. Moreover, the determination and staying power of the US-led coalition in contesting Soviet and Soviet-inspired expansionism—the essence of the Cold War from an anticommunist perspective—was *the* factor that made the other two formative developments possible.

These two other developments are (1) economic globalization—which, economists agree, has increased overall prosperity and median per capita incomes, has greatly accelerated international travel, and, in scores of nations worldwide, has increased people's ability to purchase automobiles, personal computers, cellular phones, and other consumer products; and (2) political democratization—which, the respected nongovernmental organization Freedom House notes, has more the doubled the number of the world's "free" nations from forty-one in 1975 to ninety in 2012.

Because the stakes were so high in the ideological and territorial struggle between communists and anticommunists, one could easily argue that the Cold War was the fulcrum of global history after 1945. For without growing economic integration and political freedom—central, albeit unevenly realized goals of the US-led coalition during and after the Cold War—today's world would not have materialized. When it became apparent to the communist leaders of China (in the late 1970s) and of the Soviet Union (in the late 1980s) that government-regulated capitalism and international economic integration generally worked much better than communism in promoting economic growth, these leaders stopped trying to spread communism to other nations and helped end the Cold War.

Like almost all historical developments, the victory of the US-led coalition in the Cold War was not inevitable. Roughly ten nations became communist between 1945 and 1960, and at least six more did so between 1960 and 1980. In contrast, only one or two nations abandoned communist rule during those thirty-five years. In other words, the ability of communists to seize control of governments during the Cold War was impressive, especially considering that the US-led coalition was stronger overall than the one led by the Soviet Union.

The Cold War ended by 1990, but economic globalization—along with generally rising living standards—has continued. And so has political democratization, though the slight drop from ninety "free" nations in 2012 to eighty-eight in 2013 is a reminder that personal freedom, free elections, and the rule of law are fragile achievements, easily undone.

No comprehensive, single-volume history of the Cold War is about to appear—nor is one likely to be published in the future. Such a book would probably comprise at least five thousand pages, were it to discuss adequately the differing government policies relating to the forty-five-year-long East–West struggle—as well as the differing domestic contexts—in at least fifty nations (including colonies that became nations) between 1945 and 1990.

Because this much shorter book is part of a series designed to increase students' understanding of American history, it is appropriate to focus here largely on US actions and attitudes and on relations

between the Cold War's two leading actors, the United States and the Soviet Union. It also makes sense to give substantial attention to the two large-scale but limited wars that grew out of the conflict—the Korean War and the Vietnam War—and to the most dangerous confrontation of the nuclear age thus far: the Cuban missile crisis. Above all, this book seeks to explain the Cold War's beginnings in the mid-1940s, the alternating tendencies in US–Soviet relations between the late 1940s and the mid-1980s toward increased hostility, then toward reduced tensions, and then back again, and the conflict's rapid and surprising ending in the late 1980s.

I hope that this text reflects the four values that I admire most in the work of fellow scholars: readability; accuracy within the limits of current scholarship; willingness to make judgments, however tentative and open to subsequent revision; and fairness to all the individuals and governments involved.

Perhaps because the last value listed above is the one that academics equipped with 20/20 hindsight and ideological agendas most often violate, I consider fairness the noblest virtue in writing history. In seeking to exercise this virtue, one should avoid self-righteous criticisms of leaders, who often were forced to make decisions in the midst of uncertainty and conflicting pressures. One should also bear in mind an observation made by the eminent British historian C. V. Wedgwood: "History is written backward but lived forward. Those who know the end of the story can never know what it was like at the time."[1]

Benefiting from valuable new scholarship produced during the past ten years, I have revised significantly this third edition. In particular, the sections on the Vietnam War have been extensively revised, and there is an entirely rewritten section on President Richard Nixon's policies in Vietnam. The sections on President Ronald Reagan's policies toward the Soviet Union are also completely new.

The six "Counterparts," designed to bring important historical actors to life and to emphasize the contrasting viewpoints that epitomized the Cold War, are new to this edition as well. I hope that they will stimulate student discussion and debate, starting perhaps with the seemingly narrow question: "Could s/he really have believed *that*?

Also new to this edition are endnotes. Partly in order to limit the total number, I normally reference only quotations by other scholars (secondary sources), and not quotations by officials and others at the time events occurred (primary sources), which can be easily accessed in such online sources as presidential papers and newspaper or magazine articles. I regret not being able to locate—and thus include—some references to secondary sources.

One other question—a broad one—deserves a brief answer here: What was the Cold War about? In other words, what were some of the main beliefs, goals, fears, and concerns on both sides that underlay the surface manifestations of the conflict? Five underlying factors—each of which could be the subject of a separate, longer book—come to mind immediately.

First, America and Russia had fundamentally different ideologies that affected virtually every aspect of their approaches to both domestic affairs and international relations. US officials (and most voters) believed in personal freedoms protected by law, elected government, regulated capitalism at home, and the desirability of spreading similar forms of democracy and capitalism abroad. Soviet leaders, in contrast, rejected personal freedoms, elected government, and capitalism as outdated, "bourgeois" concepts, both domestically and internationally, and sought instead the spread of communist beliefs and institutions. Writing in 1999, historian Frank Ninkovich captured the essence of the conflict:

> The cold war was a historical struggle over which ideology or way of life would be able to form the basis of a global civilization. It was intended to be a peaceful struggle, but it would be a war to the finish: Whichever side emerged triumphant, it would be impossible for the other to survive with its ideology intact.[2]

Because foreign policies are based on perceived national interests as well as on ideologies, however, occasionally the two nations were able to work together to a considerable extent. Their informal alliance in World War II and the period of relative détente in the early 1970s are the best examples.

Second, both US and Soviet leaders had deep-seated concerns about national security throughout the Cold War. For Americans, these concerns largely began with the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, which prompted feelings of vulnerability that continued throughout the wartime and postwar years. The Cold War competition—and especially Russia's testing of a nuclear weapon in 1949, which was followed by a nuclear arms race—helped maintain these feelings throughout the conflict.

Beginning with Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in 1917, Soviet leaders feared intervention by capitalist ("imperialist") nations with the intention to destroy the communist experiment in Russia. Small-scale interventions by Allied forces between 1918 and 1920 enhanced these fears, as did the tenet of Marxist–Leninist ideology that capitalist nations would try to end communism by military means. That belief appeared to come true on June 22, 1941, when Nazi Germany violated a 1939 nonaggression pact and attacked the Soviet Union. The all-out German effort to conquer Russia left lasting feelings of vulnerability and a determination to protect Russia's security in the future at all costs.

Third, America and Russia—largely for reasons relating to ideology, prestige, and security—undertook continuing efforts during the Cold War to expand the number of allies they each had and to prevent losses to the other ideology, whether by choice or by conquest. Examples of the seriousness with which each side sought to avoid losing allies include the US interventions in Korea and Vietnam and the Soviet interventions in Hungary and Afghanistan.

Fourth, US and Soviet leaders repeatedly sought to avoid substantial fighting between their two nations' forces that could easily have led to a third world war. In other words, whether the top leaders were Harry Truman and Joseph Stalin, John Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev, or Ronald Reagan and Yuri Andropov, during periods of high tension there was a strong commitment on both sides to avoiding war between America and Russia. Avoiding a third world war was the greatest achievement of US and Soviet leaders during the Cold War.

Fifth, because domestic politics and foreign policies are inextricably intertwined, the Cold War involved struggles for power and

the exercise of power domestically as well as internationally. Scholars of the Soviet Union frequently argue that Stalin's determination to maintain total control over the Russian people contributed to his decision, shortly after World War II, to have the Soviet news media portray western nations as implacably hostile. This alleged hostility, in turn, justified political repression and large-scale military spending at a time when most Russians wanted more consumer goods and greater individual freedom. Both during Stalin's time and later, disagreements over foreign policy were used to justify demotions and other shifts in power within Soviet leadership.

In America, with congressional elections every two years and presidential elections every four, the struggle for power between Democrats and Republicans is virtually constant. Not surprisingly, US relations with Russia and other communist nations—the central foreign policy issue after 1945—quickly became a staple of electoral politics throughout the nation and of partisan jockeying for advantage in Washington. In the late 1940s, prominent Republicans and Democrats also worked to end the influence of members of the Soviet-directed American Communist Party and their supporters in government agencies, labor unions, and other areas of American life. Although talk of "communists in government" largely disappeared by the mid-1950s, the question of which party or candidate could handle relations with Russia and other communist nations more effectively continued to be a major issue in elections until the late 1980s.

One simply cannot understand important US Cold War policies—for example, why America did not establish diplomatic relations with communist China for thirty years after 1949, or why President John Kennedy believed that his only realistic choice was to insist upon the removal of the Soviet missiles from Cuba in 1962—without knowledge of the domestic political context in which these policies were made.

For this edition four well-known scholars of US foreign relations kindly agreed to read the entire manuscript and offer detailed suggestions: Steven Casey, Justus D. Doenecke, Gary R. Hess, and Wilson D. Miscamble. I am truly grateful for their help. Three

other able scholars—Russell Crandall, C. Earl Edmondson, and Scott Kaufman—read portions of the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions, as did a close friend, Charles Raynal.

I also wish to thank all those who read and commented on previous editions of the book: Aleine Austin, William Burr, Wolfgang Christian, Andrew J. Davidson, Robert A. Divine, C. Earl Edmondson, A. S. Eisenstadt, John Hope Franklin, John Lewis Gaddis, Maureen Hewitt, Wallace Irwin, Jr., Walter LaFeber, Patricia W. Levering, Arthur S. Link, Elizabeth Morgan, Thomas R. Maddux, Charles Neu, Louis Ortmeyer, David Patterson, Jack Perry, Harry Stegmaier, Jr., J. Samuel Walker, and Robert C. Williams.

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This book is dedicated to Patricia Webb Levering, my wife of forty-eight years and my best friend since we met in tenth-grade algebra class. During all these years Patty has made real and life-giving such words as commitment, equality, faith, mutuality, trust, and—above all—love.

Ralph B. Levering

Notes

1 C. V. Wedgwood, *William the Silent: William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, 1533–1584* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944), 32.

2 Frank Ninkovich, *The Wilsonian Century: US Foreign Policy since 1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), p. 150.

Prologue: Uneasy Allies, 1941–1945

I got along fine with Marshal Stalin. He is a man who combines a tremendous, relentless determination with a stalwart good humor. I believe he is truly representative of the heart and soul of Russia, and I believe that we are going to get along very well with him and the Russian people—very well indeed.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Radio address to the American people, December 24, 1943

Of course, one of the most pressing questions in everybody's mind is what Russia intends to do about the political integrity of small states around her borders—Finland, Poland, the Baltic and Balkan states.

Wendell L. Willkie, Republican leader, *The New York Times Magazine*, January 2, 1944

In retrospect, the twenty months beginning with Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union[1] in June 1941 and ending with the capture of a huge German army at Stalingrad and a successful Soviet offensive against German forces in February 1943 formed a major turning point in twentieth-century history. In 1941 the German dictator Adolf Hitler, a compulsive high-stakes gambler in the often fatal game of world politics, made two moves that ultimately led to the destruction of German military power and to

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his own death by suicide, as his ruined and defeated nation was preparing to surrender in May 1945. The first of these moves was the massive German invasion of Russia on June 22, 1941. Not only was Hitler choosing to attack the nation with which he had signed a nonaggression pact less than two years earlier, but he was also taking on a populous nation to the east before he had defeated his chief enemy to the west, Great Britain. Hitler's second and even more inexplicable move was to take on a third potent enemy by declaring war on the United States on December 11, 1941, four days after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor formally brought the United States into World War II.

In 1941 Hitler had thus unwittingly put together the Big Three—America, Britain, and Russia—as leaders of a twenty-five-nation anti-Axis coalition that came to be known as the Grand Alliance. And in 1942 and 1943 that coalition turned the tide of battle away from the initially successful Axis nations (Germany, Japan, and Italy) and toward the Allies, who were superior in population, raw materials, and their ability to manufacture war materiel.

The Big Three's joint war against Germany was less than half over by February 1943, but the outcome no longer seemed in doubt—assuming that the Allies remained united in the war effort. And if they won, the two largest and most powerful nations on their side, America and Russia, stood to have far more influence in world affairs than either of them had ever had before.

Even in wartime, America—unlike Russia—was a relatively open society in which news media conveyed to the public the major issues in world affairs being discussed in the political capital (Washington) and in the media capital (New York), and in which conscientious pollsters surveyed and widely publicized the opinions of average citizens. One of those issues—whether the two emerging "superpowers" would be able to cooperate in fashioning a genuine and lasting peace after the war—was summed up in a question the Gallup pollsters frequently asked: "Do you think Russia can be trusted to cooperate with us when the war is over?" Never absent from public discussion, this ethnocentric yet

pertinent question grew in strength and urgency as German armies retreated or were overwhelmed in 1943 and 1944, and it became a major theme in newspapers and in news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* by early 1945. A more pressing issue in 1942 and 1943, well known to President Franklin Roosevelt and other officials but little discussed publicly in Washington or in the media, was whether the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, might make a separate peace with Hitler, thus destroying the Grand Alliance before Germany was defeated.

These two issues were related: if the Allies fell apart during the war, they obviously would not be able to cooperate as victors afterward. Each of the two issues also showed a level of suspicion toward the Soviet Union that seldom appeared in official or media discussions of America's other key ally, Great Britain.

The tensions in US–Soviet relations during World War II can be well illustrated by focusing on three questions that bear on the coming of the Cold War. First, why did US officials fear, during 1942 and 1943, that Stalin might make a separate peace with Hitler? Second, what were Stalin's and Roosevelt's goals for the postwar world, and how might they be evaluated? And, third, how and why did the future of Poland become a contentious issue in Big Three relations in 1944 and 1945—one that, in retrospect, portended the eventual collapse of the Grand Alliance? Consideration of these questions will help explain why there was substantial concern, in Washington, Moscow, and elsewhere, about whether cooperation between Russia and its western allies would continue in the postwar world.

US leaders were well aware that Stalin had good reasons to consider trying to work out a separate peace with his former partner, Hitler. First, Russian troop losses—killed, wounded, captured, and missing—were horrendous, averaging well over one hundred thousand per week from mid-1941 through 1943 (all told, an estimated twenty-seven million Russians died in the war, by comparison with about four hundred thousand Americans—a ratio of more than fifty to one). By the fall of 1942, most of the western half of the Soviet Union lay in ruins, and each day's fighting resulted in even more damage. Second, from his Marxist–Leninist

viewpoint, Stalin distrusted all the large western capitalist nations and not just Nazi Germany, believing that they all sought the destruction of the world's only major communist nation.

Recent history seemed to confirm his communist fears. His two main allies, America and Britain, had sent troops to Russia in 1918–1920, partly to help the conservative "whites" against the communist "reds" in the civil war that followed the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. The United States had refused to recognize the Soviet government until 1933, and the British had acquiesced in excluding Czechoslovakia's eastern neighbor, Russia, from the infamous Munich conference of 1938, which effectively ceded Czechoslovakia to Hitler. Throughout the mid- to late 1930s, in fact, western democracies had turned a deaf ear to Russia's pleas for a united stand against German expansion. Not without some reason, Stalin suspected that the British and the French wanted Germany to attack his country and destroy its communist government.

When Germany attacked Russia in June 1941, Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, the British prime minister, offered Stalin support, but only because they considered Hitler to be a much greater threat. Proclaiming that he would do everything that he could to assist the Russians, Churchill, formerly an avid anti-Bolshevik, used his clever wit to explain his change of heart: "If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons." Harry Truman, at the time a little known senator from Missouri, expressed many Americans' distaste for both governments when he commented that, although he did not want to see Hitler win, the United States should help whichever nation was losing "and that way let [both of] them kill as many as possible."

During 1942 and 1943 Stalin came to believe that, despite soothing words to the contrary, his western allies were doing what Truman had suggested. They were bleeding Russia, he thought, in two ways: first, by not delivering on time all of the supplies they promised the hard-pressed Russian forces; and, second, by not opening a large-scale second front in Western Europe. By forcing Hitler to shift troops to the west, such a front could ease German military pressure on Russia—and perhaps shorten the war as well.

The absence of a second front in Northwestern Europe in 1942 or 1943 was almost certainly the main reason why Stalin considered a separate peace. He desperately urged his allies to invade Western Europe: he sent Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov to Britain and America in May–June 1942 to plead for a major second front to be opened that year and received an apparent public promise from Roosevelt that he would do it. But Churchill argued that opening a large-scale second front was impossible, both because of a shortage of equipment and supplies and on the grounds that he did not want to risk heavy British losses. Russia's western allies thus launched a much smaller operation against German forces, in North Africa, which profoundly disappointed Soviet leaders. The promised second front was postponed once more in 1943, as British and US forces fought relatively small numbers of Axis forces in Italy. Much more than Churchill, Roosevelt and US military leaders favored a second front; but Roosevelt did not wish to risk heavy losses either—a luxury of choice that the embattled Stalin could only dream of having.

Upon learning, in June 1943, that there would be no major second front until the next year, an angry Stalin wrote Roosevelt that the Soviet government's "confidence in its allies … is being subjected to severe stress." The Soviet leader cited the need to reduce "the enormous sacrifices of the Soviet armies, compared with which the sacrifices of the Anglo-American armies are insignificant." In 1943 Stalin recalled his pro-western ambassadors from London and Washington and entered into secret peace negotiations with Germany. "The first cracks in the wartime alliance began over the issue of the second front," historian Robert L. Messer has concluded, "and formed the gap between promise and reality that widened steadily during 1942 and 1943."[2]

Despite these and other tensions, relations between the Soviets and their western allies improved in the fall of 1943, culminating in a generally positive meeting between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin at Teheran, Iran, in late November to early December. At this meeting the two western leaders made a firm commitment to Stalin to open a second front in France the following spring (this was fulfilled in the massive D-Day invasion of June 6,

1944) and Stalin promised to enter the war against Japan within three months of Germany's defeat. Numerous other issues were discussed, but few concrete decisions were made. What stood out was a general spirit of cooperation, made easier by the fact that winning the war—an easier task than working out the details of the ensuing peace—would continue to have the highest priority for the foreseeable future. This emphasis at Teheran on not letting specific disagreements undermine the broader commitment to Big Three cooperation would continue for the next fifteen months, until after the Yalta Conference of February 1945.

Most Americans, including President Roosevelt, wanted strongly to believe that America and Russia would be able to cooperate in shaping a lasting peace. Indeed, what seemed at the time to be the alternative—a third and even more devastating world war—was almost too horrible an idea to contemplate. Yet thoughtful Americans realized that the two nations had very different histories, ideologies, and postwar objectives and that it would take highly skilled diplomacy—and perhaps some luck—to keep US–Soviet relations from turning sour after Hitler's defeat.

By the time of the Teheran Conference, both Stalin and Roosevelt appeared to be committed to working out a peace settlement that would be acceptable to both nations. From Stalin's standpoint, this should have been fairly easy to do—except for the inherent untrustworthiness of the "imperialist" (capitalist) nations. The key, Stalin thought, was for the Big Three to make deals in which each nation's basic interests were protected. To Stalin, the Big Three, having won the war, should make the peace. The opinions of the people of the defeated Axis nations, or even of other small countries in Europe and Asia, were not important.

Stalin, the Soviet Union's absolute dictator, knew just what he wanted for his country. He wanted to return the Soviet Union to Russia's 1914 borders: that is, he wanted back all the lands—including the Baltic states and eastern Poland—that had been seized from Russia during and after World War I. He wanted to help ensure that Germany would remain weak after the war, so that it could not prepare for a third horrible war against Russia. He wanted reparations from Germany that would assist in

rebuilding the shattered Soviet economy. He wanted sufficient control over the nations territorially placed between Russia and Germany—from Finland and Poland in the north to Romania and Bulgaria in the south—so that they could never again be allies of Germany or another western power in a war against the Soviet Union. And he wanted some relatively modest concessions in Asia in return for his promise to enter the war against Japan.

Perhaps above all, Stalin wanted his western allies to accept his requests as appropriate and legitimate. Russia had made the lion's share of the sacrifices required to defeat Germany, and it deserved proper compensation. What he was asking for was not only earned, he believed, but necessary for Soviet security. In his view he was not asking for too much, partly because the "imperialist powers" would still control the rest of the world, including Western and Southern Europe, the oil-rich Middle East, Africa, Latin America, and much of Asia. In short, Stalin was pursuing what might be called a diplomacy of clarity, in which a large part of the world would be divided into well-defined spheres of influence, each under the ultimate control of one of the Big Three.

Stated in this simplified way, Stalin's postwar goals appear reasonable, indeed almost benign. Yet there were problems with this approach—and, equally, with Stalin himself as a leader—that concerned thoughtful Americans and Britons, including Roosevelt and Churchill. The biggest of them was that the approach would almost certainly destroy the possibility of self-determination—that is, of freedom from external domination and of freedom for internal democratic political processes—for the roughly ninety million people of Eastern Europe. These were values that Americans believed they were fighting for, values that were embodied in such important wartime documents as the Atlantic Charter of 1941 and the Declaration of the United Nations of 1942.

A second problem for America and Britain was whether Stalin's goals were as clear and as limited as they appeared to be at the time. Was it possible that, after absorbing Eastern Europe into his communist sphere of influence, he would encourage the communist parties that he controlled in other countries—France and Italy, for example—to try to take power? As a Marxist–Leninist,

Counterparts: Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Joseph Stalin

Counterpart 0.1 FDR.
Photo by Elias Goldensky. Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

The first-ever meeting between top US and Soviet leaders, Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) and Joseph Stalin, took place in Teheran, Iran, between November 28 and December 1, 1943. Also present at the historic Teheran Conference was the third member of the Big Three, Winston Churchill, the prime minister of Great Britain, who played an ostensibly equal role in the proceedings. At the meeting Stalin frequently made jokes at Churchill's expense. Roosevelt, eager to prove his friendship toward Stalin as well as to dispel any notion that America was somehow teaming up with its staunch ally Britain in a two-against-one contest against Soviet Russia, went along with Stalin's taunts and even made a bit of fun of his close friend's "Britishness" and personal traits such as the perennial cigar. FDR also tried to show impartiality by meeting privately with Stalin but not with his friend Churchill.

Counterpart 0.2 Joseph Stalin.
Source: Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

After working hard for three days to win Stalin's trust and friendship, on the afternoon of December 1 Roosevelt met alone with Stalin and asked him for several favors relating to US domestic politics. The first, to which Stalin readily consented, was that Roosevelt, who knew he would need Polish American votes in the next fall, would not approve publicly until after the 1944 election of the changes in Poland's borders to which he and Stalin had just agreed.

Next, noting that Americans believed in the right of self-determination and that the United States had a number of persons of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian origin, FDR asked Stalin to permit a "referendum" to allow the people of these small Baltic states to decide whether or not to become part of the Soviet Union. Roosevelt added that he was personally "confident" that, if allowed to vote, the people would choose to join the Soviet Union. Finally, he asked Stalin to announce that future elections would be held after Russian troops replaced the German forces currently occupying the three Baltic states.