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**REEXAMINING SOVIET POLICY
TOWARDS GERMANY
DURING THE BERIA INTERREGNUM**

**JAMES RICHTER
Bates College**

Working Paper No. 3

Washington, D.C.

June 1992

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An old joke made the point that the former Soviet Union was a country with an unpredictable past. The point remains valid, though now it pertains less to changing official versions of Soviet history than to popular and even Western scholarly interpretations of the Soviet interlude in Russian history. As archives open, we will have a more accurate knowledge of things we could only speculate about before, and no doubt the end of the cold war will lead scholars to interpret differently even very familiar chapters.

This article offers a step in that direction by examining recent disclosures about Soviet decision-making towards Germany in the period from Stalin's death in March 1953 until Beria's arrest in late June of that same year. Many historians and political scientists have wondered if there might have been a chance during this short period to reunify Germany more than thirty years before Gorbachev came to power. Certainly the Soviet leadership showed unprecedented flexibility at this time both in its relations with the West and in its domestic policies. As regards Germany, the Soviets briefly revised their policy to emphasize reunification rather than consolidating socialism; indeed, in early June the East German party under General Secretary Walter Ulbricht announced a New Course that explicitly abandoned an earlier policy of constructing socialism.

The United States responded cautiously, even skeptically, to these developments. The Eisenhower administration had just entered office on a platform of virulent hostility to communism, and the President and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles discounted the changes in the East as cosmetic or insincere. Certainly they did not consider seriously any change in their goal of integrating West Germany into the NATO alliance. Eisenhower did adopt a more conciliatory tone towards the Soviet Union in a speech on April 16, but predicated any substantive changes in US policy on sweeping Soviet concessions. Britain responded more

boldly: on April 20 and more explicitly on May 11 Prime Minister Winston Churchill suggested the leaders of the four victorious powers hold a summit meeting. The Eisenhower administration strongly opposed this plan, however, and a four-power summit did not take place until July 1955.¹ The question remains, then: If the United States had responded more positively to Soviet overtures, would the Soviets in turn have been willing, in interest of easing tensions, to trade the reunification of Germany for its neutralization? Did, in fact, Dulles' mistrust of Soviet intentions cause him to miss an opportunity to "roll back" communism in East Germany?

The issue remains important not only for its implications for German and Russian history, but also for students of international relations. The end of the cold war has given rise to a debate between those who view containment as a clear and obvious success, and those who argue that images of the enemy in both the United States and the Soviet Union resulted in the squandering of several opportunities which, if seized in a timely fashion, might have ended, or at least mitigated, the cold war many years earlier. The interpretation that emerges from this debate may well affect our responses to conflicts in interests with other countries in the future.

In recent years, a great deal of new information has come to light about Soviet intentions toward Germany in 1953, mostly in the form of direct and indirect memoir accounts of major protagonists in Soviet politics of the period. In the United States, recent publications include the memoirs of Andrei Gromyko and a supplement to Khrushchev's memoirs, *The Glasnost Tapes*.² Additional sections of Khrushchev's memoirs have been published in Russian.³ We also have an account of Molotov's reminiscences, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym* [One Hundred Forty Conversations with Molotov], recorded in numerous conversations with the former Foreign

¹ For a summary of U.S. and British foreign policy towards the Soviet Union at this time see M. Steven Fish, "After Stalin's Death: The Anglo-American Debate Over a New Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 10:1 (Fall 1986), 334-55. Also see Richard Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990). On the conditions in Eisenhower's speech see Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, vol. 2: *The President* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1984), 172.

² Andrei Gromyko (trans. Harold Shukman), *Memories* (London: Hutchinson, 1989). N.S. Khrushchev (trans. and ed., Jerrold L. Schecter with Vyacheslav V. Luchkov), *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990).

³ N.S. Khrushchev, "Aktzii" [Actions], in V. F. Nekrasov, ed., *Beria: Konets kar'ery* [Beria: End of a Career] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991), 262-81.

Minister during the last ten years of his life by an obscure poet and ardent Stalinist named Feliks Chuyev.⁴ Malenkov's side of the story can be found in several articles written by his son Andrei, as well as in interviews given to this author and others by Dmitri Sukhanov, Malenkov's closest aide during the 1940s and 1950s.⁵ Finally, the memoirs of Rudolf Herrnstadt, East German Politburo member, editor of *Neues Deutschland*, and a key proponent of reform during the period after Stalin's death, have appeared in Germany.⁶

As many of these new accounts are secondhand reports of reminiscences, and as none of the authors made use of documents from the period in question, this material should be approached with even greater care than most memoir accounts. Yet the existence of several accounts make them more valuable. Where they agree, we stand on firmer ground, and where they contradict each other, as they often do, the contradictions themselves tell us what the leaders felt was important.

In addition, we can check these accounts against other information now emerging from the darkened past. In Germany, for example, the Soviet instructions to the East German leadership in June 1953 have now been published, and in 1991, the Soviet journal *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* published the stenographic report of the July 1953 Central Committee meeting that discussed and approved Beria's arrest.⁷ While additional documents may soon become available as well, this new information enables us to make new conclusions about Soviet foreign policy

⁴ Feliks Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed c Molotovym*, (Moscow: Terra, 1991).

⁵ For Andrei Malenkov's story, see Andrei Malenkov, "Protivoborstvo" [Counterstruggle], *Zhurnal'ist* 2 (February), 1991, 60-66; and Dmitrii Varskii, "Skhvatka" [Skirmish] (Interview with Andrei Malenkov), *Vostochnii Ekspress* [Eastern Express] 16, 1991, 8-9.

⁶ Rudolf Herrnstadt (intro. and ed. by Nadja Stulz-Herrnstadt), *Das Herrnstadt Dokument: Das Politburo der SED und die Geschichte des 17. Juni 1953* [The Herrnstadt Document: The SED Politburo and the History of 17 June 1953] (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990).

⁷ The German documents include "Ein Dokument von grosser historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953" [A Document of Great Historical Importance from May 1953], *Beitrage zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* [Contributions to the History of the Workers' Movement] 32(5), 1990, 648-54. "Dokumente zur Auseinandersetzung in der SED 1953" [Documents Regarding the Conflict in the SED 1953], *Beitrage zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 32(5), 1990, 655-72. The Soviet source is "Delo Beria" [Stenographic Report of the July, 1953 Plenum], *Izvestiia TsK KPSS* 1-2 (January-February), 1991, 140-214, 147-208. All citations of this report will refer to the first installment in the January edition unless otherwise noted.

towards Germany in 1953 and to suggest new questions for future research. This article reviews this newly published material.

The Soviet Leadership Debate After Stalin's Death

Any account of Soviet German policy after Stalin's death must consider the internal and external challenges facing the new leadership. For years, the regime's legitimacy relied heavily on the fear and awe inspired by Stalin's person. Stalin himself carefully cultivated a feeling at all levels of society that his leadership was an indispensable guarantee of domestic stability and external security. His personality cult identified him as the only person with both the wisdom and strength to recognize and eradicate the agents of imperialism at home and abroad. Soviet propaganda after World War II, for example, suggested that Stalin himself, much more than either the military or party leadership, delivered Russia from the fascist invaders.

Stalin's death left the new leadership fearing panic in the population and searching for a new formula for longterm legitimacy.⁸ At the same time, they perceived serious threats from outside their borders, including an ongoing war in Korea that threatened to escalate and a hostile U. S. administration that had at its disposal a nuclear arsenal enormously superior to the Soviet nuclear capability. It is not surprising in these circumstances that Stalin's warning that "the imperialists would wring their necks like chickens" left such a strong impression on Khrushchev.⁹

The new leadership's first impulse was to adopt a more flexible policy in order to ease their fear of instability. Domestically, they increased funding for consumption and put an end to the campaign against the so-called "Doctor's Plot" that portended the beginning of a major new purge. Internationally, they adopted a more conciliatory posture toward the West in order to

⁸ For a deeper discussion of Soviet debates after Stalin's death, see N.A. Barsukov, *XX S'ezd KPSS i ego istoricheskie real'nosti* [The Twentieth Congress of the CPSU and its Historical Realities] (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991); George Breslauer, *Khrushchev and Brezhnev as Leaders: Building Authority in Soviet Politics* (Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1982); James Richter, "Action and Reaction in Khrushchev's Foreign Policy: How Leadership Politics Affect Soviet Responses to the International Environment" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1989).

⁹ Nikita S. Khrushchev (ed. and trans. by Strobe Talbott), *Khrushchev Remembers*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1970), 392.

reduce the chances of immediate conflict. At Stalin's funeral, for example, all three speakers--Beria, Malenkov and Molotov--spoke in favor of Peaceful Coexistence.¹⁰ Furthermore, they backed up these words with tangible concessions. By the end of May, the Soviet had renounced all territorial claims on Turkey, reestablished diplomatic ties with Yugoslavia and Israel and, most importantly, pushed the Chinese and North Koreans to soften their negotiating positions over the Korean conflict, opening the way to an armistice in July.

Still, if the leadership agreed that they had to reconcile the Party-State regime both with the domestic population and with the international environment, they differed substantially on how much the revolutionary identity of the Party should be sacrificed towards achieving this end. The clearest visions of the Soviet future could be found in the rhetoric of Molotov and Malenkov.¹¹ To his death, as his reminiscences show, Molotov remained a fervent Stalinist, whose complete faith in the Party's identity as the vanguard of social transformation led him to perceive all social formations not controlled by that party as potentially hostile to the socialist mission. His image of the international environment paralleled this image of the Party. He made a sharp distinction between the socialist and the capitalist world, and felt that the struggle between the two ideologies could only be decided by violent struggle. Needless to say, he did not favor any concessions to the imperialist countries, believing that such concessions would weaken the socialist camp in a later war. Instead, his foreign policy strategy sought to use declarations of peacefulness to divide the imperialists against themselves in order to protect the Soviet state and to encourage greater activism among the "progressive forces" in the capitalist world.

Malenkov's strategy focused less on the identity of the party as an agent of social transformation and more on a technocratic effort to manage and preserve the "accomplishments" already achieved in the 1930s. Malenkov, therefore, tended to favor a more thorough reconciliation between the Party and its environment, both in domestic society and in international

¹⁰ *Pravda*, 10 March 1953.

¹¹ A more complete description of Molotov's and Malenkov's strategies are found in Richter, "Action and Reaction in Khrushchev's Foreign Policy," ch. 2. See also Paul Marantz, "Internal Politics and Soviet Foreign Policy: A Case Study," *Western Political Quarterly* 28:1, 1975, 130-46.

relations. At home, he favored the ascendancy of state organs over the party apparatus as best adapted to a managerial policy and called for an even greater shift in investment policies towards consumer industries.¹² In foreign policy, he clearly believed that Soviet nuclear weapons safeguarded the Soviet Union from direct attack by the imperialists and enabled the Soviet Union to offer genuine concessions to the West. Indeed, Malenkov believed that the United States could maintain NATO only by invoking the image of an aggressive enemy. Soviet concessions, by depriving Washington of an enemy, would divide NATO, and so greatly minimize the international threat to the socialist camp.¹³

The leadership debate was complicated by mutual mistrust. Stalin had protected himself against challenges from within the elite by keeping his closest advisers divided amongst themselves and dependent on himself. Indeed, one of the most striking impressions emerging from the memoir accounts is how much each leader suspected that the others not only represented a threat to his physical security, which Western scholars have long imagined, but also conscious or unconscious traitors to the entire socialist cause. Molotov's memoirs, for example, call Khrushchev "in essence a Bukharinite," "against everything revolutionary," and "alien to the party."¹⁴ Khrushchev, for his part, depicted Molotov as a dogmatist, a "shadow of Stalin" who "occasionally showed unbelievable stubbornness, bordering on stupidity."¹⁵ Both these leaders perceived Malenkov as too easily influenced by others and unable or unwilling to stand up for his positions in the face of opposition.¹⁶ Finally, Malenkov's friends have joined in Khrushchev's criticism of Molotov but describe Khrushchev himself as an "intriguer" not much more principled than Beria.¹⁷

¹² See in particular his speech to the Supreme Soviet in *Pravda*, 9 August 1953.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 360-65. The contempt is particularly apparent in Molotov's assertion that he deliberately avoided visiting Khrushchev's grave in Novodevichii cemetery.

¹⁵ Khrushchev's characterization of Molotov is found in Khrushchev, *The Glasnost Tapes*, 69, 77.

¹⁶ Khrushchev's characterization found in Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 393. Molotov's description can be found in Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 338.

¹⁷ Interviews with Andrei Malenkov and Dmitri Sukhanov.

In fact, the differing perceptions among the leadership about the others' relations with Beria illustrate well the atmosphere of suspicion. Molotov consistently speaks of the *troika* existing between Beria, Khrushchev and Malenkov.¹⁸ Khrushchev's memoirs, on the other hand, agree with most Western and current Soviet accounts in emphasizing the longstanding tie between Beria and Malenkov. Khrushchev admits that after Stalin's death, Beria started to pursue closer relations with him, which he did not rebuff. But Khrushchev says he was motivated to work with the secret police chief by tactical considerations of self-preservation.¹⁹

The arguments of Malenkov's champions mirror Khrushchev's views. They say that Malenkov's seemingly close relations with Beria stemmed largely from tactical considerations and that Khrushchev was Beria's closest confidante. In fact, they argue, Malenkov began to reduce Beria's control over the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD) soon after Stalin's death, to such an extent that Malenkov became a threat to the secret police chief. In their accounts, this led Beria to seek Khrushchev's support in a conspiracy against Malenkov.²⁰ Instead, Khrushchev reported Beria's proposal to Malenkov, which then led to their joint conspiracy discussed in Khrushchev's memoirs.²¹

Though Malenkov could not be described as Beria's friend, their association in factional struggles was too long-lived to be dismissed simply as tactical. Beria had shared Malenkov's managerial approach to domestic and foreign policy at least since the end of the war.²² Still, the accusations that Beria solicited Khrushchev's help in a plot against his long-time ally are quite possibly true. During the July Plenum, for example, Khrushchev himself stated that "Beria drew me into an intrigue against Malenkov."²³ Furthermore, the account of Malenkov's supporters successfully explains why Khrushchev first approached Malenkov in the plot against Beria, when

¹⁸ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed c Molotovym*, 332.

¹⁹ Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 323-25; Khrushchev, "Aktzii," 262-63.

²⁰ Malenkov, "Protivoborstvo," 65-66; also author's interviews with Dmitrii Sukhanov.

²¹ The joint conspiracy is described in *Khrushchev Remembers*, 323-41.

²² For the alliance between Beria and Malenkov, see William O. McCagg, Jr., *Stalin Embattled* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982); Gavriel Ra'anana, *International Policy Formation in the USSR: Factional "Debates" During the Zhdanovshchina* (Harden, CT: Archon, 1983).

²³ "Delo Beria," 158.

Khrushchev himself thought Malenkov was Beria's chief ally.²⁴ In fact, Khrushchev felt threatened by Beria from the very beginning, but he may have feared to act upon his concerns until Beria's proposal provided him a reason to believe he could count on Malenkov's support.²⁵

The Status of the German Question in 1953

In foreign policy, the leadership debate centered on the German question. Here, the post-Stalin leaders faced two dangers. To the West, they watched with anxiety as the Adenauer regime consolidated its hold on West Germany. In Soviet eyes, the political and military institutions of the new regime in Bonn were dominated by former Nazis. The new leadership particularly feared Western plans, as laid out in the Paris Agreement of May 1952, to include the Bonn government in the NATO alliance and rearm it under the auspices of the European Defense Community. To the Soviets, this Western embrace of the recent enemy could only portend a direct and imminent threat to their security.

Stalin had also feared the remilitarization of West Germany. In March 1952, as the final terms of the Paris Agreements were being worked out, he sent a note to the three Western powers proposing to reunify Germany as a neutral, democratic country. It is still unclear what Stalin intended with this note. Most Western accounts argue that the proposal was simply intended to resume the debate in the West, and thereby postpone or possibly prevent the terms of the Paris Agreement from becoming reality.²⁶ Certainly Molotov believed that Stalin never would have forsaken the socialist regime in Berlin while he was alive.²⁷

²⁴ Author's interviews with Andrei Malenkov and Dmitri Sukhanov; *Khrushchev Remembers*, 330-31.

²⁵ According to both his memoirs and his account before the July Plenum, and corroborated by Bulganin at the July Plenum, Khrushchev expressed his concern over Beria's dangerous ambitions to Bulganin at the time of Stalin's death. See *Khrushchev Remembers*, 324; "Delo Beria," 150.

²⁶ Analysts who argue Stalin's note did not represent a serious offer to reunify Germany include Marshall Shulman, *Stalin's Foreign Policy Reappraised* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 191-94, and William Taubman, *Stalin's America Policy* (New York: Norton, 1982), 221. Alternative views are found in Paul Raymond Willging, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the German Question: 1950-1955" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1973), 123-48, and Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1968), 534-37.

²⁷ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 335.

At any rate, nothing came of the proposal. The United States had already decided that it would rather ensure that West Germany was anchored in the West than take a risk on a unified but neutral Germany, and so Washington refused to make any concessions. The negotiations failed after a short exchange of notes could not produce agreement on the timing and procedures for All-German elections. By August 1952, Soviet declaratory policy had shifted away from the goal of reunification towards emphasizing the existence of two Germanys, insisting for example that the German question could be resolved only with the full and equal participation of both German governments.

Soviet fears of Adenauer's growing strength in West Germany were magnified by the economic crisis which threatened the viability of Ulbricht's socialist regime in East Germany.²⁸ In the summer of 1952, after Stalin's attempt to block the Paris Agreements had failed, Ulbricht initiated a crash program of Sovietization. This program drastically increased investments allotted to heavy industry, strangled small private enterprises with increased taxation, accelerated the collectivization of agriculture, restricted travel between East and West Germany, and launched a concerted campaign against religious activity in East Germany. By Stalin's death, the program had resulted in consumer shortages, budget deficits, and, most importantly, a large increase in emigration to the West. In late 1952, the situation had deteriorated to the point that the Soviet government had to send extraordinary subsidies to bolster its East German allies, but with little effect.²⁹ According to contemporary Soviet figures, 120,000 East Germans left for the West during the first four months of 1953.³⁰

Given this situation, the new leaders in Moscow agreed that Ulbricht should abandon his crash Sovietization campaign in the East, in part to help stabilize the socialist regime, but also to supplement their own foreign policy reorientation. The Soviet leadership agreed to adopt a more

²⁸ Accounts of East Germany's economic crisis can be found in Victor Baras, "Beria's Fall and Ulbricht's Survival," *Soviet Studies* 27:3 (July 1975), 381-95, and Arnulf Baring, (trans. by Gerald Onn), *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972).

²⁹ Fritz Schenk, *Im Vorzimmer der Diktatur* [In the antechamber of the Dictatorship] (Koln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1982), 165.

³⁰ "Ein Dokument von grosser historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953," *Beitrage zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 32(5), 1990, 648-54.

conciliatory tone toward the West in an effort to divide the Western alliance, to encourage the activity of Western "progressive forces," particularly West German Social Democrats, and, consequently, to prevent West German rearmament. Changes in Soviet policy reflected this consensus. On 25 April 1953, in a response to Eisenhower's speech of April 16, *Pravda* argued that German reunification might be possible before concluding a peace treaty, thereby distancing Soviet policy from Stalin's insistence that both Germanies take part in such a treaty.³¹ One month later, on May 25, *Pravda* went further along these lines by announcing that Moscow would place the reunification of Germany at the center of its European policy and call for a policy "coordinated" by the four powers to resolve the issue.³²

The change of course in East Germany did not happen as quickly. On May 14, for example, a Plenum of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) moved forward on a purge of the party announced in December 1952 and removed Fritz Dahlem, regarded as a critic of Ulbricht, from the Politburo. More importantly, the plenum promulgated an increase in work norms, effectively lowering wages by ten percent, in an attempt to alleviate the financial crisis brought on by the Sovietization campaign.

But Ulbricht could not forestall a change in his policy for long. On May 27, the Presidium of the Soviet Communist Party met to discuss measures regarding the situation in East Germany, and the decisions were made available to the Soviet Council of Ministers on June 2.³³ Soon afterward, on June 2-4, Ulbricht, East German Premier Otto Grotewohl, and SED Politburo member Fred Oelssner, who acted as interpreter, travelled to Moscow to receive the Kremlin's instructions, and returned on June 5 with Soviet representative Vladimir Semenov. Semenov had acted as political adviser to the East German leadership throughout Ulbricht's campaign to construct communism, was recalled to Moscow in late April 1953, and then was returned as Soviet High Commissioner on May 28, one day after the Presidium's decisions.

³¹ *Pravda*, 25 April 1953.

³² *Pravda*, 25 May 1953, cited in Willging, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the German Question," 169.

³³ The date is recorded in "Delo Beria," 144n.

On June 9, after extensive meetings of the East German Politburo, the leadership in Berlin decided how it would respond to the Soviet instructions. It announced its decision to the population in a communique published in *Neues Deutschland* on June 11. The communique criticized the mistakes made by the socialist regime in East Germany and announced a New Course in East German policy that reversed most of Ulbricht's Sovietization campaign: changes in investment policy shifted towards consumer goods; the pressures on small private enterprise were removed; collectivization ceased; travel restrictions were eased; and policies against religious activity were discontinued.³⁴ Variants of this New Course were later introduced in other Eastern European countries, notably in Hungary, but the East German version was both the first and the most extensive.³⁵ Indeed, the very mention of socialism disappeared from government propaganda shortly after June 11.³⁶

Unfortunately, the New Course never would materialize as envisioned in the June 11 communique, for two reasons.³⁷ First, the liberalizations of the New Course did not extend to the raise in work norms announced in May, and thus did not ease worker discontent. More importantly, under pressure from Ulbricht and Semonov, the leadership announced the New Course decisions without first convening a Party Congress or a Plenum of the Central Committee, and even without conducting a propaganda campaign in the central press that might inform the apparatus why such radical change was necessary and how to implement the new policy.³⁸ The resulting inconsistencies were exemplified in the June 14 edition of *Neues Deutschland*, which contained an editorial written by Herrstadt that condemned the new work norms as well as news articles praising particular workers who had exceeded those same norms.³⁹ On June 16 and 17,

³⁴ *Neues Deutschland*, 11 June 1953. The discussions that took place in the East German Politburo leading to the final communique are found in Herrstadt, *Das Herrstadt-Dokument*, 56-75.

³⁵ Willging, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the German Question," 172-74.

³⁶ Willging, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the German Question," 178.

³⁷ For a discussion of reasons for the factors leading to the uprising, see Baring, *Uprising in East Germany*, 28-32.

³⁸ See Herrstadt, *Das Herrstadt-Dokument*, 72-75.

³⁹ Baras, "Beria's Fall and Ulbricht's Survival," 380.

the combination of confusion among the ranks of the elite and anger among the workers led to a massive political uprising which could only be put down by Russian tanks.

Yet the uprising did not end immediately the movement towards reform in Eastern Germany. The first response came in the form of resolutions of the SED Central Committee, written by Herrnstadt himself and published on June 21. Though these resolutions accused Western agents of having orchestrated the uprising rather than admit that the unrest emerged spontaneously from popular dissatisfaction, they also blamed the Party for making itself vulnerable to imperialist intrigues: "When masses of workers do not understand the Party, the Party is to blame, not the workers."⁴⁰ Malenkov echoed this argument as late as his speech before the CPSU Plenum on July 2.⁴¹

The continuing, indeed intensifying, threat to Ulbricht's leadership after June 17 also suggests that the uprising did not foreclose the possibility of a German settlement. Ulbricht's leadership style had been the target of increasing criticism ever since his return from Moscow on June 5.⁴² On June 6, the Politburo appointed a commission consisting of Ulbricht, Herrnstadt, Grotewohl and Wilhelm Zaisser, the head of the East German security police (*Staatssicherheitsdienst*) and an ally of Herrnstadt's reformist program, to formulate New Course policies for party affairs. The proceedings of the commission's first meeting, held on June 25 or 26, can be found both in Herrnstadt's memoirs and in a document, written by Herrnstadt soon after the meeting was over, that summarizes the commission's proposals and sets the agenda for a second meeting. These proposals would eliminate Ulbricht's position of General Secretary and dissolve the SED Central Committee Secretariat, replacing it with a smaller secretariat made of four members from the Politburo.⁴³

⁴⁰ Herrnstadt, *Das Herrnstadt Dokument*, 91.

⁴¹ "Delo Beria," 144.

⁴² A fuller discussion of the struggle can be found in Herrnstadt, *Das Herrnstadt Dokument, passim*. Many of the actual documents are found in "Dokumente zur Auseinandersetzung in der SED 1953."

⁴³ "Dokumente zur Auseinandersetzung in der SED 1953," 658; Herrnstadt, *Das Herrnstadt-Dokument*, 105-11.

Only after Beria was arrested on June 26 did the attack on Ulbricht begin to falter.⁴⁴ Herrstadt recalls that within days after the commission met on June 25, Semonov began to make disparaging remarks about Zaisser to Ulbricht and Grotewohl.⁴⁵ Soon after this, on or about July 2, a second meeting of the commission took place, this time with Soviet representative B. Miroshnichenko taking part. At this meeting the proposal to do away with the Central Committee secretariat was rejected under the influence of Miroshnichenko, who cited Soviet precedent to oppose such a move.⁴⁶ Then, in a Politburo meeting soon after the July Plenum, Ulbricht took the offensive against his chief opponents, Herrstadt and Zaisser. At the 15th Plenum of the Central Committee on July 24-26, Herrstadt and Zaisser were removed from the Party leadership and accused of having aligned themselves with Beria and planning to "restore capitalism" in the GDR.⁴⁷

The Soviet Decision on East Germany

Clearly, the question of what steps might have been possible toward resolving the German question in 1953 depends largely on the Soviet decisions of May 27. The rhetoric calling for German reunification and the disappearance of references to socialism in the East German press have led several analysts to suggest a reunification might have been possible.⁴⁸ Furthermore, considerable evidence that has been available for some years argues that Beria, at least, favored a grand bargain that would reunify Germany as a capitalist, neutral government. Even the timing of Herrstadt's and Zaisser's decline, as well as the accusations directed at them, suggest that this was the case. In addition, as early as 10 July 1963, Khrushchev maintained that Beria (and Malenkov as well) had wanted to "liquidate" the East German state.⁴⁹ Gromyko also remembers that Beria approved such a plan but argues that Malenkov opposed it.⁵⁰ Are these accounts

⁴⁴ This new information substantiates the argument of Baras, "Beria's Fall and Ulbricht's Survival."

⁴⁵ Herrstadt, *Das Herrstadt-Dokument*, 111.

⁴⁶ Herrstadt, *Das Herrstadt-Dokument*, 117-18.

⁴⁷ Willging, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the German Question, 177, 202-4.

⁴⁸ Willging, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the German Question," 165-220; Ann L. Phillips, *Soviet Foreign Policy Toward East Germany Reconsidered: The Postwar Decade* (New York: The Greenwood Press, 1986) 130-35.

⁴⁹ *Pravda*, 10 July 1963.

⁵⁰ Gromyko, *Memories*, 315.

reliable, and, if they are, would Beria have had the power to push it through if he were not removed in late June?

The new evidence shows that the Soviet leadership, in fact, had decided against such a trade. While the Soviet instructions to the East Germans required them to abandon their "accelerated construction of socialism," the Kremlin focused primarily on the East Germans' failure to create a firm foundation for socialism, especially in the villages, before embarking on such a course.⁵¹ The document then outlined the goals of the New Course: rather than dismantling socialism, the policy aimed "for the recovery of the political situation in the GDR and for a strengthening of our positions as much in Germany itself as in the German question at the international level, and for a consolidation and a widening of the base for a mass movement for the creation of a unified, democratic, peace-loving, independent Germany."⁵²

As the last clause implies, the Soviets continued to place reunification at the center of their German policy, but suggested that if this should take place, it could do so only under socialist auspices.⁵³ It also suggests that the rhetoric of reunification served mostly as propaganda to excite opposition in the West against the militarization of West Germany rather than as a signal that the Soviets were ready to make a deal. In fact, the last instruction given to the German communists is to conduct a flexible policy aimed to ensure the "maximal division of the opponent's forces and the exploitation of every oppositional current against the tactics of the mercenary Adenauer clique."⁵⁴

On the other hand, the Soviet decision was far from unanimous. Each of the new accounts confirm that Beria did want to trade German reunification for neutralization; in fact, this figured strongly in the condemnations of Beria at the July Plenum of the Central Committee. Molotov's account appears to be most reliable: not only do his memories correspond better to what we already know about the major protagonist's positions, but, in addition, the language he

⁵¹ "Ein Dokument von grosser historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953," 652.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 653.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 654.

uses in recalling the debate, especially during his speech in the Plenum, more closely parallels the actual language used in the Presidium's instructions.⁵⁵

According to Molotov, the Presidium meeting began with a proposal, drafted in the Foreign Ministry by Molotov and Gromyko, to instruct Ulbricht to stop the "forced" construction of socialism and wait until a firmer foundation was established.⁵⁶ Beria then countered this proposal with a suggestion that the GDR might abandon socialism altogether, so long as a reunified Germany remained "peace-loving." Significantly, the accounts of both Molotov and Khrushchev, despite their mutual accusations on other issues, agree that both these leaders vigorously opposed Beria's plan. Both accounts further recall that Molotov later approached Khrushchev to convey his appreciation and surprise that Khrushchev had opposed Beria's plan.⁵⁷

Beria's motivations for making this proposal seem puzzling at first glance. If Beria wanted to use his command over the secret police to gain dictatorial power after Stalin died, which is a reasonable assumption, how could a proposal to give up one of the Soviet Union's most important acquisitions from World War II fit into his plans? When one considers his power base as head of the secret police more carefully, however, one sees the logic in the move. To gain power, Beria had to overcome the secret police's legitimacy deficit: the party institutions remained the accepted interpreters of Marxism-Leninism; the secret police was supposed to follow the party's orders. Beria therefore shared with Malenkov a desire to downplay the role of ideology and enhance the role of the state apparatus, which probably explains their longstanding alliance. Still, their motivations for such a shift in legitimacy were quite different: Malenkov hoped to broaden the regime's avowed constituency beyond the working class to include more of the population, while Beria hoped to strengthen the legitimating claims of the secret police.

⁵⁵ See "Delo Beria," 162-64; Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 333-34; and "Ein Dokument von grosser historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953," 648-54.

⁵⁶ The account mentioning the Foreign Ministry proposal occurs in Molotov's reminiscences with Chuyev (pp. 333-34). In Molotov's speech before the Plenum, however, he ignores the Foreign Ministry proposal and merely states that Beria offered a proposal to reunify Germany, and then he, Molotov, modified it to reverse only the course of "accelerated development"; see "Delo Beria," 164. The discrepancy is minor, however.

⁵⁷ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 333; Khrushchev, "Aktzii," 263.

Beria's legitimacy deficit in relation to the party also helps to explain why he appealed to nationalist feelings in many of the recently conquered Soviet republics soon after Stalin's death. Since World War II, Beria had been put at a disadvantage by the particularly strident strains of Great Russian chauvinism in postwar Soviet propaganda. After Stalin's death, however, Beria could use the traditional internationalist language of Marxism-Leninism to appeal to nationalist sentiments in Western Ukraine, Belarus and the Baltic states to weaken the Russian-dominated apparat in those areas. He wrote several memoranda proposing to remove the Russian officials in those areas and replace them with local people, and even suggesting that official discussions take place in the language of the titular nationality.⁵⁸ Moreover, in what emerged as perhaps the most prominent accusation against Beria at the July Plenum, Beria called on members of his internal police apparat to report on the ethnic make-up of local party organizations and on the inadequacy of these organizations' work in these areas.⁵⁹

In foreign policy, Beria's efforts to deemphasize Marxism-Leninism as a legitimating ideology led Molotov to argue that "Beria was not particularly interested in the essential [read ideological] questions of politics, but thought, the strength exists such that no one will touch us."⁶⁰ Very probably, given Beria's longstanding responsibility for Soviet nuclear research, the police chief shared Malenkov's view that Soviet nuclear weapons were sufficient to deter the West. Beria, therefore, was unlikely to accept increased international tensions or the expenditure of enormous domestic resources to preserve a failing socialist regime in East Germany. Indeed, an East German failure might reinforce a fear that the ideology could not, in and of itself, ensure stability, and therefore strengthen the role of the secret police.

Beria's deemphasis on ideology also explains the most curious revelation in the stenographic report of the July Plenum. Malenkov claimed in his speech that Beria approached

⁵⁸ Beria's relative isolation on national issues after World War II and after Stalin's death is found in Charles H. Fairbanks, Jr., "National Cadres as a Force in the Soviet System: The Evidence of Beria's Career, 1949-53," in Jeremy Azrael, ed., *Soviet Nationality and Practice* (New York: Praeger, 1978), 144-86.

⁵⁹ Beria's use of the secret police apparatus to report on the Party was first condemned in the July Plenum in Malenkov's speech; "Delo Beria," 141-43. The accusation was repeated by almost every other speaker as well.

⁶⁰ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 335.

him just before the arrest with a plan, which Malenkov rejected, to try to normalize relations with Yugoslavia through the Interior Ministry. The party leaders further reported finding among Beria's papers a letter to A. Rankovic, the head of the Yugoslav secret policy, proposing secret negotiations to improve relations between the two countries, which might even include a meeting between Beria and Yugoslav leader Yosef Tito. He also assured his Yugoslav counterpart that "no one will know of this conversation except yourself and comrade Tito."⁶¹

Molotov's opposition to Beria's plan is quite predictable. His vision of socialism's unrelenting struggle against the forces of capitalism caused him to reject Beria's suggestion that a capitalist Germany could ever be neutral or "peaceful."⁶² Even if the government ostensibly supported neutrality, a capitalist Germany necessarily would support the imperialists in case of war. Furthermore, as Molotov conceived war to be inevitable, the strategic significance of Germany's industrial potential and position in the center of Europe was far too great to hand the country over to the class enemy.⁶³ Therefore, he maintained, the Soviets should retain their control over as much German territory as possible, even if socialism in East Germany could be constructed only at a much slower pace than desired. At the same time, Molotov would and did support the adoption of more conciliatory rhetoric in order to divide the elements of the class enemy against themselves and so prevent the cohesion and consolidation of the Western Alliance. The Presidium's advice to the East Germans to pursue such a strategy bolsters Molotov's claim that the decision of May 27 had been formulated in the Foreign Ministry.

Khrushchev's opposition to Beria stemmed from a different world view. Molotov, in a comment that is both insightful and unfair, argues that Khrushchev's objections to Beria stemmed more from Russian patriotism than from socialist ideology.⁶⁴ In fact, no one reading Khrushchev's memoirs can doubt the First Secretary's convictions regarding the superiority of Soviet socialism over capitalism. Furthermore, as the only member of the Central Committee Secretariat in the

⁶¹ "Delo Beria," 143.

⁶² Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 333.

⁶³ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 331.

⁶⁴ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 336.

Party Presidium at the time, he had a great stake in maintaining Marxist-Leninist ideology as a starting point for legitimating the regime's domestic and foreign policies. Abandoning socialism in any country, and particularly Germany, would have been abhorrent to Khrushchev both personally and politically.

But Molotov's accusation against Khrushchev contains much truth in it. Ever since Stalin formulated the policy of "socialism in one country," Soviet ideology had infused official Marxism-Leninism with liberal doses of "red patriotism."⁶⁵ In fact, both Molotov and Khrushchev identified the interests of the world communist movement with Soviet state interests. Molotov, though, proceeding from his image of international politics as the struggle of two opposing social systems, argued that Soviet state interests were identical to the interests of world communism, whereas Khrushchev described them as overlapping but distinct. World revolution, he argued, could occur only when other peoples followed the Russian example and accomplished their own revolution. The Soviet Union could best serve this cause by increasing its own strength and thus deterring imperialist attacks on emerging socialist countries.⁶⁶ Khrushchev's first priority, then, was to preserve Soviet power.

Khrushchev's remarks at the July Plenum illustrate this quite clearly. Khrushchev agreed with Molotov that a neutral, capitalist Germany effectively would become a bastion of imperialism, but Khrushchev couched his rhetoric less in terms of the struggle between two social systems than in terms of an international balance of power between states, particularly between the Soviet Union and the United States. Reunifying Germany, Khrushchev argued, would not merely strengthen imperialism, but more specifically would place "18 million Germans under the mastery of American imperialism."⁶⁷ Furthermore, this would occur less because of capitalist modes of production in a unified Germany than because the United States would take advantage of Soviet weakness. Ridiculing the notion, supposedly put forward by Beria, that an international

⁶⁵ Robert Tucker, *Political Culture and Leadership in Soviet Russia: From Lenin to Gorbachev* (New York: Norton, 1987) 65-70.

⁶⁶ For Khrushchev's foreign policy strategy, see James Richter, "Action and Reaction in Khrushchev's Foreign Policy," ch. 3.

⁶⁷ "Delo Beria," 159.

agreement could ensure Germany's neutrality, he argued that "if a treaty is not reinforced by strength, than it is worth nothing, and others will laugh at us and consider us naive."⁶⁸

Khrushchev and Molotov do not agree completely on Malenkov's position in the discussion, though they both disagree with Gromyko's contention that he outspokenly opposed the plan. Khrushchev argues that Malenkov joined Beria in making the proposal; Molotov's account suggests that Malenkov made no strong commitment either way, but probably was inclined to support Beria's plan.⁶⁹ According to Molotov, Malenkov first remained silent about Beria's proposal, which Molotov interpreted as support, and then wavered on the plan. Both Dmitri Sukhanov and Andrei Malenkov, on the other hand, told this author that Malenkov favored reunification as a neutral country because he considered the division of Germany artificial and contrary to the historical development of that country. It is unclear, however, how much German reunification in 1989-90 shaped their memories.

Other information currently available reinforces the view that Malenkov would have accepted easily a plan to reunify a neutral Germany, but would not insist upon it to the point of endangering his domestic position. To some extent, Malenkov's wavering stance reflected his reputed inability to argue forcefully for any position. But given his willingness in March 1954 to risk his position with a statement that nuclear war would destroy the socialist system along with the rest of world civilization, this cannot be the entire story.⁷⁰

In addition, Malenkov's position on Germany corresponded to his managerial approach that emphasized stabilizing existing social relations under the Soviet state rather than preserving the Party's mission to transform society. He was not averse to the creation of an East German state, but he was concerned that the Soviets not pay the costs of imposing socialist transformations where the historical conditions were not right. In addition to any philosophical reasons Malenkov may have had, such a policy would hinder his reform program at home. Supporting an unviable regime in East Germany would require further Soviet subsidies, while the

⁶⁸ "Delo Beria," 157.

⁶⁹ Khrushchev, "Aktzii," 262; Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 334; Gromyko, *Memories*, 316.

⁷⁰ *Pravda*, 12 March 1954.

need to use force in order to build Soviet-style socialism in that country would make his arguments for a more conciliatory domestic policy less persuasive.

Malenkov's speech to the July Plenum reflects these concerns. He joined in the general condemnation of Beria's plan to abandon the East German regime, as the situation required him to do if he wanted to keep his position, but he devoted less time to the question of the dangers of a reunified, capitalist Germany than he did to the problems involved in forcing socialism on East Germany.⁷¹ Molotov, by contrast, focused on the traitorous character of Beria's proposal and took care to argue that the existing policy was only intended to slow down, rather than abandon, the construction of socialism in East Germany.

Malenkov's perspective on the Soviet international situation suggests further reasons to believe that he might have approved German reunification. Like Beria, Malenkov's belief that the Soviet nuclear deterrent would prevent an imperialist attack may have led him to believe that maintaining Soviet control of an artificial East German state would not provide any additional benefits in national security that would compensate for the domestic costs of such a policy. In fact, it might increase the threat to the Soviet Union by increasing East-West tensions and facilitating the rearmament of West Germany. An agreement to reunify Germany, on the other hand, might ease tensions to the point of splitting NATO.

According to Molotov, the divisions in the Presidium prevented the leaders from making a decision on East Germany at the initial meeting, but instead caused them to refer the question to a special commission consisting of Malenkov, Beria, Molotov, and perhaps others as well.⁷² Meanwhile, the politicking continued. Bulganin contended, both in his speech before the Plenum and in a conversation recalled by Khrushchev, that Beria spoke to him after the meeting and warned him that if he did not withdraw his opposition to Beria's plan, he might be removed as Defense Minister.⁷³ Meanwhile, Molotov, observing that Khrushchev continued his seemingly

⁷¹ "Delo Beria," 144.

⁷² See Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 334. Bulganin, too, mentions a commission in his speech before the July Plenum, but he suggests that he was a member as well; see "Delo Beria," 174.

⁷³ Khrushchev, "Aktzii," 263; Bulganin speech, "Delo Beria," 174. There are some differences in the two accounts. According to Khrushchev, Bulganin told him of phone calls from both Malenkov and Beria attempting

friendly relations with Beria and Malenkov, called the Party Secretary later that evening to make sure he had not changed his mind. According to Molotov, Khrushchev's assurances on this point put his mind at rest, for he knew that "all the waverers who have not yet expressed themselves [on this question] will support Khrushchev." Finally, Molotov reports that Beria tried once more to get him to accept reunification, but when this failed withdrew the proposal and accepted the draft presented by Molotov and the Foreign Ministry.⁷⁴

Molotov probably exaggerates the ease with which the leadership arrived at the final instructions, for the Kremlin decision given to the SED leadership shows signs of compromise on important issues. For example, the instructions call on the East Germans not simply to halt collectivization, but actually to review all the collective farms and dissolve those that "were created on an involuntary basis or have proved themselves unviable."⁷⁵ According to Herrstadt, this instruction was included at Beria's behest.⁷⁶

In addition, the instructions explicitly subordinated all further decisions related to the German question "for this or any period," as well as the "implementation of every concrete measure to strengthening the GDR," to a "strict" consideration of "the real conditions within the GDR as well as the situation of Germany as a whole and the international situation."⁷⁷ This vague statement seems to leave open the possibility that the Soviet leadership might reconsider the existence of the East German state and the possibilities of reunification should international conditions demand it. While there is no evidence that this paragraph in the instructions had been proposed by either Beria or Malenkov, it suggests they prevented the Presidium from making any irretrievable decision on East Germany's status.

to persuade Bulganin to change his mind on the German question. In Bulganin's speech, Beria alone approached him just before a meeting of the special commission. The discrepancy on the time of the conversation is not important. Khrushchev is probably embellishing when he says Malenkov called Bulganin as well, just as he embellished the Prime Minister's support of Beria's proposal in the May 27 meeting.

⁷⁴ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 334.

⁷⁵ "Ein Dokument von grosser historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953," 652.

⁷⁶ Herrstadt, *Das Herrstadt-Dokument*, 69-70.

⁷⁷ "Ein Dokument von grosser historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953," 654.

The foregoing account affords us several insights into leadership politics during the post-Stalin years. During most of the cold war years, Western analysts described Soviet leadership politics as a struggle for power, in which Soviet decisions simply reflected the balance of power among the leading protagonists. The new information does not challenge these arguments, but it does show that all of these debates took place within the context of a search for leadership consensus. For example, most analyses of the period, and indeed most leadership decisions in the months after Stalin's death, suggest that Beria and Malenkov held the advantage over everyone else in the leadership. Yet on this issue of supreme importance, Molotov and Khrushchev were able to overrule them. Indeed, Molotov's account suggests that Khrushchev played a far more important role during these first months than was generally appreciated, while Malenkov, who is often considered the strongest leader of the period, "did not play a decisive role."⁷⁸

More importantly, the Presidium's ability to maintain an outward appearance of unanimity at this time, despite the existence of such disparate views in an atmosphere of lethal competition, suggests how strong the norm for party unity governed party decisions at that time. Clearly, the leadership felt so besieged from both internal and external pressures that they felt expression of dissent in the upper echelons would lead to a collapse of the regime--and this fear was probably justified, given the East German experience. As Malenkov argued at the July Plenum: "All of the world [that is] hostile to us mistakenly based their calculations on a struggle inside the leadership of our Central Committee. Our enemies falsely counted on confusion in party ranks, on the absence of unity and on splits in the party's leadership."⁷⁹

Conclusion

The new material regarding Soviet decisionmaking towards Germany after Stalin's death seems to raise as many questions as it answers. On the one hand, we now know that the Soviet leadership was not willing to trade German reunification for neutralization in 1953, but it also

⁷⁸ Chuyev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, 335.

⁷⁹ "Delo Beria," 140. While all the other Presidium members speaking at the Plenum echo this view, it is most prominent in Mikoyan's speech; see "Delo Beria [Part 2]," 50.

shows that the leadership was sharply divided on this matter of utmost importance. Furthermore, we may never know all the intrigues that occurred behind the backs of the Soviet and East German leaderships. After all, one of the clearest themes running through the stenographic report of the July Plenum is that Beria habitually had pursued his policy goals outside the view of the top leadership. In addition to instructing the secret police to observe the local party organizations, in addition to proposing a secret meeting with Tito, Malenkov announced that Beria had taken it upon himself to arrange the explosion of a hydrogen device (presumably a reference to the test ultimately conducted in August 1953) without informing the Central Committee or the Presidium, while Bulganin accused Beria of seeking access to classified material on the Soviet military without letting the Defense Minister know of his request.⁸⁰

Clearly Beria also had men in place in East Berlin upon whom he could rely to do his work in spite of the Kremlin's formal decisions. The *Herrnstadt-Dokument*, not surprisingly, denies, with some credibility, any connection between the author (a key East German reform leader) and the Soviet secret police chief. Herrnstadt claims to have opposed vehemently Beria's plan to undo the already collectivized farms in the GDR.⁸¹ But Beria almost certainly influenced the activities of East German secret police chief Wilhelm Zaisser and very likely others as well.

Would anything have changed if the United States had adopted a more conciliatory policy? The amount of time available to the West to respond was quite short, as Beria's June arrest closed any window of opportunity. The July Plenum's explicit and official condemnation of Beria's proposal to abandon the East German regime as a crime against socialism would have made it extremely difficult for anyone to propose a similar plan at any time in the near future, even if Malenkov had been so inclined. In fact, after the July Plenum Soviet declaratory policy began to move decisively towards Stalin's earlier two-Germany solution to the German question.⁸²

⁸⁰ For the discussion of Beria's decision on exploding a nuclear weapon, see "Delo Beria," 145; on Bulganin's accusation, see "Delo Beria," 174.

⁸¹ Herrnstadt, *Das Herrnstadt-Dokument*, 67-70.

⁸² See Willging, "Soviet Foreign Policy in the German Question," 221-29.

On the other hand, Malenkov continued to occupy the most visible position in the Soviet leadership, suggesting that Beria's arrest did not remove all possibilities for a much improved international climate if the West had been more forthcoming. After all, considerable evidence existed in these first few months after Stalin died that Malenkov's interpretation of world politics had merit. Tensions between the United States and Great Britain had already emerged when the Eisenhower administration rejected Churchill's call for a summit. By July 3, in fact, Churchill suggested in private communications that he might be willing to meet the Soviet leadership without the Americans.⁸³

But even if the West had the time to influence Soviet decisionmaking at this juncture, would a more responsive US policy really have altered the internal dynamic of the Soviet Presidium, especially given the strong positions of Molotov and Khrushchev? While no definite answer can be given to this question, there is room for speculation. First, the Soviet leadership began to distance itself from Stalin's foreign policy in an article *responding* to Eisenhower's speech on April 16. Is it possible that the conciliatory tone of that speech enabled some of the Presidium members to argue that there is some room for experimenting with a more substantive shift in Soviet policy?

The more intriguing question asks what would the Soviet response have been if the United States had supported Churchill's bid for a summit rather than subverting it. Khrushchev and others in the leadership did not support the idea of a summit. In their view, the cold warrior Churchill desired a summit to take advantage of the Soviets at a time of apparent weakness. Furthermore, Khrushchev feared that Malenkov could not be trusted to stand up for Soviet interests in such a forum: Malenkov was "unstable to the point of being dangerous because he was so susceptible to the pressure and influence of others."⁸⁴ Though we do not yet know Malenkov's position on a possible summit meeting at this time, Khrushchev's concerns suggest that not only that he supported a summit meeting, but also that such a meeting, even if it did not reunify

⁸³ Steven Fish, "After Stalin's Death: The Anglo-American Debate Over a New Cold War," 343.

⁸⁴ Khrushchev, *Khrushchev Remembers*, 393.

Germany, might have had fruitful consequences for world peace. Could Khrushchev and his colleagues in the Presidium have resisted vigorous United States pressure for a summit, given that the leadership was so internally divided, yet also so intent on projecting a peace-loving image?

This question, too, we can never answer fully, as US policy made it only too easy for Khrushchev and those who agreed with him to prevent such a meeting. Instead, the United States proposed a Foreign Ministers' conference to discuss the German question in order to deflect pressure from its allies for a four-power summit.⁸⁵ The Soviet leadership rejected a meeting with such a narrow agenda, and instead proposed a meeting that would include the Chinese and discuss a whole range of questions dividing the East and the West. When public opinion in the Western countries condemned this proposal, the Soviets reluctantly agreed to the narrower agenda.⁸⁶ Thus, both the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to a four-power meeting in deference to world opinion, but at the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Berlin in January-February 1954, both sides could be assured that their representatives, Dulles and Molotov respectively, would not be lured into any unnecessary concessions.

In sum, the new information suggests that no realistic opportunity to reunify Germany existed in the months after Stalin's death. The Soviets had decided in late May not to abandon East Germany in return for a demilitarized, united Germany, and, though the instructions to East Berlin suggested the decision could have been reconsidered at a later date, no Western proposal could have changed their mind in the short time before Beria's arrest in late June. On the other hand, the new information also shows a fluidity in Soviet decisionmaking after Stalin's death that most Western accounts have not appreciated, suggesting that even if the division of Germany could not have been avoided, U.S. actions may have had a significant impact on other aspects of Soviet foreign policy decisionmaking.

⁸⁵ Steven Fish, "After Stalin's Death," 344-45. See also Rolf Steininger, "The EDC and the German Question," in Immerman, ed., *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, 83-84.

⁸⁶ See Audrey Kurth Cronin, *Great Power Politics and the Struggle Over Austria* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), 129.

Thus, we still do not have a clear-cut answer about the impact of U.S. actions on Soviet decisionmaking after Stalin's death. But as the Soviet chapter of Russian history comes to a close, there may be some virtue in uncertainty. It spurs further research, reminding scholars with even greater clarity that Soviet development need not have taken the course it did, even after the Stalinist period, but that several moments existed in which different courses could have been chosen. It also illustrates the many factors contributing to the choices that were made; in particular, it shows how international pressures may have influenced fundamental internal debates about the Party's identity and its relations to the domestic and international environment. Finally, it offers the United States one good lesson from the cold war: look carefully at the domestic politics of the country the United States wishes to influence, and be aware that US actions can affect other countries' foreign policies in unpredictable ways.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James Richter is a Professor of Political Science at Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. He received his Ph. D. in 1989 from the University of California at Berkeley, where he wrote his dissertation on "Action and Reaction in Khrushchev's Foreign Policy: How Leadership Politics Affect Soviet Responses to the International Environment." This paper is part of his work towards a book on the interaction of domestic and international influences on Khrushchev's foreign policy. Research for this paper was supported in part by a grant from the International Research & Exchanges Board (IREX) with funds provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States Information Agency. None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed.