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The United States, the East German Uprising of 1953, and the Limits of Rollback

Christian Ostermann

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List of Abbreviations

CC = Central Committee

CDU = *Christlich-Demokratische Union* (Christian Democratic Union)

DDEL = Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, KS

DDEP = Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers

EDC = European Defense Community

FDJ = *Freie Demokratische Jugend* (Free Democratic Youth)

FO = Foreign Office

FOIA = Freedom of Information Act

FRUS = *Foreign Relations of the United States*

GDR = German Democratic Republic

HICOG = (U.S.) High Commissioner in Occupied Germany

MfAA = (East German) Ministry for Foreign Affairs

NA = National Archives, Washington, D.C.

NRC = National Records Center, Suitland, MD

NSC = National Security Council

NWDR = *Nordwest Deutscher Rundfunk* (Northwest German Radio)

PRO = Public Records Office

PSB = Psychological Strategy Board

RIAS = Radio In the American Sector

RG = Record Group

SAPMO-BArch = *Stiftung "Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR" im Bundesarchiv* [Foundation "Archives of the Party and Mass Organizations of the Former GDR], Berlin

SCC = Soviet Control Commission

SED = *Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Unity Party)

VP = *Volkspolizei* [(East German) People's Police]

In a recent essay, historian John Lewis Gaddis pointed to one of the oddities of Western Cold War scholarship. Despite efforts at “border crossings” and internationalization, historians of American foreign relations “have made so little effort to understand what was really happening in—and what the impact of American policies was on—the ‘second world.’”¹ The East German crisis of 1953 is a case in point. Largely due to the inaccessibility of archival evidence, particularly on the Eastern side, but also due to the ideological idiosyncrasies of the era, the events of the 1953 uprising in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) have frequently been neglected by Cold War historians. But newly available evidence from the former East German and former Soviet archives have prompted historians to reconsider the crisis.² Despite differences of opinion on whether the

¹ John Lewis Gaddis, “The Tragedy of Cold War History,” *Diplomatic History* 17:1 (Winter 1993), 8.

² On the uprising: Ilko-Sascha Kowalczyk, Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, eds., *Der Tag X. 17. Juni 1953. Die “Innere Staatsgründung” der DDR als Ergebnis der Krise 1952/54* [Day X. June 17, 1953. The “Inner Establishment” of the GDR as REsult of the Crisis 1952-54] (Berlin: Ch.Links, 1995); Torsten Diedrich, *Zwischen Arbeitererhebung und gescheiterter Revolution in der DDR* [Between Workers’ Uprising and Failed Revolution], in: *Jahrbuch für Historische Kommunismus = forschung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1994), 288 ff.; *Der 17. Juni—vierzig Jahre danach* [June 17—40 Years Later], in: Jürgen Kocka (ed.), *Die DDR als Geschichte. Fragen-Hypothesen-Perspektiven* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1993), 40-66; Gerhard Beier, *Wir wollen freie Menschen sein. Der 17. Juni 1953. Bauleute gingen voran* [We Want to Be Free People. 17 June 1953. Construction Workers Marched Ahead] (Köln: Bund, 1993); Angelika Klein, *Die Arbeiterrevolte im Bezirk Halle* (The Workers’ Uprising in Halle), 3 vols. (Potsdam: Brandenburger Verein für politische Bildung ‘Rosa Luxemburg,’ 1993); Armin Mitter and Stefan Wolle, *Untergang auf Raten. Unbekannte Kapitel der DDR-Geschichte* [Decline in Installments. Unknown Chapters of GDR History] (München: Bertelsmann, 1993); Willy Müller, *Die Situation der Bauarbeiter in der Stalinallee und der Verlauf der Berliner Demonstrationen vom 16. und 17. Juni 1953 in den Berichten gewerkschaftlicher Beobachter* [The Situation of the Construction Workers in the Stalinallee and the Course of the Berlin Demonstrations of June 16 and 17, 1953, as reflected in the Reports of Union Observers] Berlin: Helle Panke, 1993; Klaus Schwabe, *Der 17. Juni 1953 in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern* [17 June 1953 in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern], (Schwerin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 1993); Dagmar Semmelmann, “Schauplatz StalinStadt/EKO:” *Erinnerungen an den 17. Juni 1953* [Memories of June 17, 1953] (Potsdam: Brandenburger Verein für politische Bildung ‘Rosa Luxemburg,’ 1993); Ilse Spittmann, “Zum 40. Jahrestag des 17. Juni” [On the Occasion of the 40th Anniversary of the 17 June Uprising], *Deutschland Archiv* 26:6 (1993), 635-39; Udo Wengst, “Der Aufstand am 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR. Aus den Stimmungsberichten der Kreis- und Bezirksverbände der Ost-CDU im Juni und Juli 1953” [The 17 June 1953 in the GDR. Internal Reports from the East German Christian Democratic Party in June and July 1953], *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 41:2 (1993) 277-322; Rainer Gries, “Westliche Markenprodukte waren die schlimmsten Provokateure. Versorgung und Propaganda in der DDR am Vorabend des 17. Juni 1953” [Western Brand Products Were Most Provocative. The Supply Situation and Propaganda in the GDR on the Eve of the 17 June 1953], *Das Parlament* 42:25/26 (1992), 9; Armin Friedrich and Thomas Friedrich, eds., “*Es hat alles keinen Zweck, der Spitzbart muß weg.*” *Der 17. Juni 1953* [“There is No Other Resort: Ulbricht Has to Go.” The 17 June 1953] (Berlin: Paetec, 1992); Manfred Hagen, *DDR. Juni ‘53. Die erste Volkserhebung im Stalinismus* [GDR June 1953: The First Popular Uprising in the Era of Stalinism] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1992); Leo Haupts, “Die Blockparteien in der DDR und der 17. Juni 1953” [The Bloc Parties in the GDR and the 17 June 1953], *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 40:2 (1992), 383-412; Torsten Diedrich, *Der 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR. Bewaffnete Gewalt gegen das Volk* [The 17 June 1953 in the GDR. Military Might Against the Populace] (Berlin: Dietz, 1991); Anke Huschner, “Der 17. Juni an Universitäten und Hochschulen der DDR” [The 17 June and the GDR Universities and Colleges], *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 33:5 (1991), 681-92; Armin Mitter, “Die Ereignisse im Juni und Juli 1953 in der DDR. Aus den Akten des MfS” [The Events in June and July 1953 in the GDR. From the Files of the Ministry for State Security], *Das Parlament* 41:5 (1991), 31-41; Heidi Roth, “Der 17. Juni im damaligen Bezirk Leipzig. Aus den Akten des PDS-Archivs Leipzig” [The 17th of June in the Former Leipzig District. From the Files of the PDS-Archives], *Deutschland Archiv* 24:6 (1991), 573-84; Christoph Buchheim, “Wirtschaftliche Hintergründe des Arbeiteraufstandes vom 17. Juni 1953 in der DDR,” *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 38:3 (1990), 415-433; Gottfried Zieger, “Der 17. Juni 1953,” in Dieter Blumenwitz, ed., *Die Deutschlandfrage vom 17. Juni 1953 bis zu den Genfer Viermächtekonferenzen von 1955* [The German Question from the 17 June 1953 to the Geneva Conference 1955] (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1990), 7-26; Ilse Spittmann and Karl Wilhelm Fricke, eds., *17. Juni*

crisis took on the character of a *revolution*, a *workers' uprising* or a *popular revolt*, the emerging synthesis of research suggests that the uprising was more widespread, prolonged, and violent than had hitherto been recognized.³ One hundred twenty-five men and women died in the course of the riots which were put down by Soviet tanks—19 in East Berlin alone—and thousands more were arrested. The Communist Socialist Unity Party (SED) files reveal that acts of opposition and defiance, as well as strikes and disturbances, pervaded the spring of 1953 and sharply increased at the beginning of June. Demonstrations and riots took place in over four hundred cities and towns and in many rural communities. Contrary to the traditional assumption that the disorders quickly subsided after Soviet military intervention, we now know that the events of June 16-17 marked only the peak of a rebellion which continued, though more sporadically, throughout the summer of 1953. Finally, the new evidence discloses the enormous and unprecedented degree to which party and state were discredited, confused, and shaken at its base. Given these revelations, the 1953 East German crisis has to be recognized as one of the most significant focal points in the history of the Cold War.⁴

International historians have come to corroborate this view. The uprising erupted during the crucial months after Stalin's death on 5 March 1953 at a time when the new Soviet leadership was engrossed in a fierce power struggle. In an effort to give an impression of continued strength

1953. *Arbeiteraufstand in der DDR* [17 June 1953. Workers' Uprising in the GDR] (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1988); Karl Wilhelm Fricke, *Opposition und Widerstand in der DDR* [Opposition and Resistance in the GDR] (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1984); Klaus Ewers, "Zu einigen langfristigen Auswirkungen des Arbeiteraufstandes am 17. Juni 1953 für die DDR" [On Some of the Long-Term Effects of the 17 June 1953 Workers' Uprising], in Ilse Spittmann and Gisela Helwig, eds., *Die DDR vor den Herausforderungen der achtziger Jahre* [The GDR and the Challenges of the 1980s] (Cologne: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1983); Axel Bust-Bartels, "Der Arbeiteraufstand am 17. Juni 1953. Ursachen, Verlauf und gesellschaftspolitische Ziele" [The Workers' Uprising on 17 June 1953. Causes, Unfolding and Social Objectives], *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 25 June (1980), 24-54; Arnulf Baring, *Uprising in East Germany: June 17, 1953* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1966); Rainer Hildebrandt, *The Explosion: The Uprising behind the Iron Curtain* (New York: Little, Brown, and Co., 1955); Stefan Brant and Klaus Bölling, *Der Aufstand. Vorgeschichte, Geschichte und Deutung des 17. Juni 1953* [The Uprising. Prehistory, History and Interpretation] (Stuttgart: Steingrüben, 1954); Arno Scholz, Werner Nicke, Gottfried Vetter, Panzer am Potsdamer Platz (Berlin: Arani, 1954); H. Brand, "East Germany: The Uprising of June 17," *Dissent* 1:1 (1954), 32-49. On W. Ulbricht (1893-1973), see Carola Stern, *Ulbricht. Eine politische Biographie* [Ulbricht. A Political Biography] (Köln: Verlag Wissenschaft und Politik, 1963). On the access to the new evidence, see Hermann Weber, "Die aktuelle Situation in den Archiven für die Erforschung der DDR Geschichte" [The Current Situation in the Archives for the History of the GDR], *Deutschland Archiv* 27:7 (1994), 690-99; Lothar Dralle, "Das DSF-Archiv als Quelle zur Geschichte der DDR - Der Volksaufstand vom 17. Juni 1953" [The Archives of the Society for German-Soviet Friendship as Source for the History of the GDR - the Popular Uprising of 17 June 1953], *Deutschland Archiv* 25:8 (1992), 837-45; Hermann Weber, "Die Wissenschaft benötigt die Unterlagen der Archive. Einige Überlegungen zur Archivsituation in Berlin" [Scholars Need Access to Archival Materials. Some Thoughts on the Archives Situation in Berlin], *Deutschland Archiv* 24:5 (1991), 452-57.

³ Torsten Diedrich, "Putsch-Volksaufstand-Arbeitererhebung?" [Coup-Popular Uprising-Labor Unrest?], *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 25 (June 1993), 31-41; Armin Mitter, "Warten auf Adenauer," [Waiting on Adenauer], *Der Spiegel* 45:22 (1991), 88-93.

⁴ Der Polizeipräsident in Berlin [The Office of the Police President of Berlin], ed., *Jahresbericht 1993 der Zentralen Ermittlungsstelle Regierungs- und Vereinigungskriminalität (ZERV)* [Annual Report of the Central Investigating Agency for Governmental and Party Crimes] (Berlin: ZERV, 1993), 48; Deutscher Bundestag, ed., *42. Sitzung der Enquete-Kommission "Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland" am 16. Juni 1953* [42nd Session of the Study Commission "Coming to Terms with the History and Legacy of the SED-Dictatorship in Germany] (Bonn: Deutscher Bundestag, 1994).

and unity, and to gain breathing space in the international arena for domestic consolidation, the Soviet leaders displayed considerable flexibility in the foreign policy arena, raising popular hopes in the West for a relaxation of Cold War tensions. With regard to Germany, the fluidity of the situation resulted from a deep disagreement within the Soviet leadership over the future of their politically and economically weakening East German satellite. The near-toppling of the SED state in the uprising influenced on the developments and decisions in Moscow.⁵

Moreover, the USSR's massive military intervention in support of its client regime, and its visibly raised commitment to SED General Secretary Walter Ulbricht and the SED dictatorship, changed the dynamics of the Soviet-East German alliance. By providing SED General Secretary Walter Ulbricht with increased bargaining power, the heightened Soviet stake in the continued existence of the GDR shifted the balance within the relationship to some degree in favor of the latter.⁶ Similarly, in the West, the uprising and the resultant surge of nationalism intensified the American commitment to Adenauer and his policy of Western integration, and at the same time bolstered the prospects of the Chancellor's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) in the September 1953 elections.

The hitherto inaccessible evidence also sheds new light on the impact of Western policies during the crisis. Historians have traditionally neglected or discounted the role played by the Western powers throughout the crisis. It was, moreover, generally believed that the West reacted with marked passivity to the momentous events in the GDR. However, this Working Paper, based on new evidence from the SED and U.S. archives, argues that the influence of U.S. propaganda media—in particular the Radio In the American Sector (RIAS) in Berlin both before and during the uprising—was much more significant than has previously been realized. Furthermore, while the Western powers, in order to avoid escalation into a superpower confrontation, eschewed military intervention to support the demonstrators, and initially lacked an effective response to the uprising, the Eisenhower Administration came to devise a psychological warfare strategy which effectively capitalized on the instability in the GDR. The central element of this strategy, a food relief program for East Germany, managed to exacerbate considerably the existing antagonism between regime and population within the GDR and succeeded in keeping the Soviets and the East German regime off balance in the volatile months following the revolt. Yet, while undermining any potential Soviet

⁵ James Richter, *Reexamining Soviet Policy Towards Germany During the Beria Interregnum*, Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) Working Paper No. 3 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1992); Vladislav M. Zubok, *Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: The "Small" Committee of Information, 1952-53*, CWIHP Working Paper No. 4 (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 1992); Gerhard Wettig, "Sowjetische Wiedervereinigungsbemühungen im ausgehenden Frühjahr 1953? Neue Aufschlüsse über ein altes Problem" [Soviet Reunification Efforts in Late Spring 1953? New Evidence on an Old Problem], *Deutschland Archiv* 25:9 (1992), 943-58; Gerhard Wettig, "Zum Stand der Forschung über Berijas Deutschlandpolitik im Frühjahr 1953" [On the State of Research on Beria's German Policy in the Spring of 1953], *Deutschland Archiv* 26:6 (1993), 674-82.

⁶ The major work on this subject is Hope Harrison, *The Bargaining Power of Weaker Allies in Bipolarity and Crisis: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961*, Ph.D. dissertation (Columbia University, 1993).

initiative for German unity as well as the new leadership's "peace offensive," this strategy tended ultimately to intensify Soviet and East German threat perceptions of American aggressiveness and might actually have reinforced the internal and external stabilization of the Ulbricht regime. Contrary to its rhetoric, U.S. policy did not aim at a roll-back of Soviet power in Germany. Rather than liberation, the American response to the East German uprising could best be characterized as a superb exercise in "double-containment."⁷ It undermined Soviet exploitation of German nationalism by squarely keeping Moscow and East Berlin on the defensive while, at the same time, containing German nationalism by boosting the election success of Chancellor Konrad Adenauer and his policy of "Westintegration."⁸

* * * * *

The origins of the East German crisis in the summer of 1953 date back to July 1952, when, under Soviet direction, the Second Party Convention of the SED (9-12 July 1952) decided on "the Construction of Socialism" in the GDR. Coming on the heels of the Western rejection of the March 1952 "Stalin note" and the signing of the General (Bonn) and European Defense Community (EDC) Treaties in May 1952, the decision for a crash socialization program seemed to mark a turning point in Soviet policy in Germany.⁹ Had Soviet designs for German unification hitherto precluded full satellization of the GDR, the announcement of the new policy by its chief advocate,

⁷ For the concept of "dual" or "double" containment see Thomas A. Schwartz, *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 299; Wolfram F. Hanrieder, *Germany, America, Europe: Forty Years of German Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 6-11, 142-44.

⁸ On the issue of *Westintegration* see Ludolf Herbst, Werner Bührer and Hanno Sowade, eds., *Vom Marshall Plan zur EWG. Die Eingliederung der Bundesrepublik Deutschland in die westliche Welt* [From the Marshall Plan to the European Economic Community. The Integration of the Federal Republic into the Western World] (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1990); Ludolf Herbst, *Option für den Westen. Vom Marshallplan bis zum deutsch-französischen Vertrag* [Option for the West. From the Marshall Plan to the German French Treaty] (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1989).

⁹ On the Stalin notes controversy see Gerhard Wettig, "Stalin and German Reunification. Archival Evidence on Soviet Foreign Policy in the Spring of 1952," *The Historical Journal* 37:2 (1994), 411-19; Gerhard Wettig, "Die Deutschland-Note vom 10 März 1952 auf der Basis diplomatischer Akten des russischen Außenministeriums" [The Germany Note of 10 March 1952 on the Basis of Russian Foreign Ministry Documents], *Deutschland Archiv* 26:7 (1993), 786-805; Gerhard Wettig, "Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 als geschichtswissenschaftliches Problem. Ein gewandeltes Problemverständnis" [The Stalin Note of 10 March 1952 as Historical Problem. A Changed Understanding of the Problem], *Deutschland Archiv* 25:2 (1992), 157-67; and see the debate between Wettig and Elke Scherstjanoi, *Deutschland Archiv* 25:8 (1992), 858-63; Michael Lemke, "Chance oder Risiko? Die Stalin-Note im außenpolitischen Konzept der Bundesregierung" [Chance or Risk. The Stalin Note of 10 March 1952 in the Federal Government's Conception of Foreign Policy], *Zeitschrift für Geschichte* 2 (1991), 115-29; and Rolf Steininger, *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung? Die Stalin-Note vom 10 März 1952. Darstellung und Dokumentation auf der Grundlage unveröffentlichter britischer und amerikanischer Akten* [An Opportunity for Reunification? The Stalin Note of 10 March 1952. Interpretation and Documentation on the Basis of Previously Unpublished Documents], *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, Supplement 12 (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1985). [Ed. note: The new policy came two months after Stalin had secretly instructed Ulbricht and other SED leaders, during a meeting in Moscow, to "organize your own state" rather than press for unification, according to a recently disclosed Soviet record of the meeting. See the excerpt of the 7 April 1952 minutes, provided by Prof. M. Narinsky, in Cold War International History Project *Bulletin* 4 (Fall 1994), 34 ff.]

SED leader Walter Ulbricht, now seemed to signal frankly that the priority of all-German concerns had been abandoned in favor of unimpeded Sovietization.

Ulbricht's course affected above all the "middle classes." Prohibitive taxes spearheaded the campaign against the private sector in trade and industry. In addition, small business owners were, by April 1953, precluded from receiving ration cards, forcing them to buy food at the overpriced state stores. The growth of heavy industry was accorded absolute priority to the detriment of the population's general living standard. Collectivization coerced independent farmers into "agricultural production cooperatives" but met widespread rejection and opposition. Those farmers who refused to collectivize were subject to exorbitant state-enforced delivery quotas. As a result, severe food shortages occurred throughout East Germany. The regime also embarked on an intensified battle against the churches. Forced and undisguised remilitarization put additional strains on the socio-economic fabric of the GDR. While prisons were filling up with the victims of socialist criminal "justice," an unprecedented number of East Germans, despite the sealing of the inner-German demarcation line, fled to Western Germany.¹⁰

These signs of growing dissatisfaction among the population were ignored by the party and state leadership. If anything, they gave the regime another means to reinforce its Sovietization policy, as witnessed by a series of trials and purges, increased control of the "bourgeois" parties, and stepped-up pressure on the Protestant Church youth organizations. Meeting in mid-May 1953, the 13th Plenum of SED Central Committee (CC) even decided to raise industrial work norms by ten percent.¹¹

Moscow did not fail to notice the mounting problems in the GDR. Responding to repeated appeals for support from the SED leadership, the Soviets, on 18 April 1953, granted the GDR fresh economic aid, reduced reparation shipments by 20-25 percent as well as the overall reparation amount, and extended the term of payment. Four days later, Vladimir Semyonov, Political Adviser to the Soviet Control Commission (SCC), was recalled to Moscow for consultations. Here he participated in the formulation of several memoranda on the German question within the Soviet Foreign Ministry's Third European Department (Germany and Austria). In their drafts, the Foreign Ministry officials called for seizing the initiative by renewed proposals to the West on reunification and economic aid to East Germany in an effort to stabilize the situation there. They argued in favor of proposing the immediate establishment of a provisional all-German government (from the two parliaments) and, immediately thereafter, the removal of all foreign occupation troops from Germany. In an effort to strengthen the GDR by increasing its international prestige, they also suggested inviting an official GDR government delegation to the USSR, and according the GDR a semblance of sovereignty by upgrading the East German and Soviet missions in Moscow and Berlin

¹⁰ For a brief summary see Mitter, *42. Sitzung der Enquete-Kommission*, 22ff.

¹¹ Hermann Weber, *Geschichte der DDR* [History of the GDR] (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1985), 213-31.

to the status of embassies. They also recommended reducing the public presence of the SCC, which was to be transformed into a Soviet Commission on German Affairs.¹²

Yet, the eagerness to seize the initiative on the German question also reflected the fact that Soviet Foreign Ministry officials did not comprehend the gravity of the crisis that was brewing in East Germany. In a 2 May 1953 memorandum, Semyonov, the SCC Political Adviser and an authority on German affairs within the Soviet establishment, advised Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov that because “[t]he Socialist Unity Party of Germany and the democratic forces in the GDR have already strengthened and matured enough to manage independently the leadership of the country,” the maintenance of overt political control by the Soviets could be sharply reduced.¹³ Thus, in Semyonov’s opinion, there was no need to do anything but “to create more favorable conditions for socialist construction in the GDR.”¹⁴

The Soviet Foreign Ministry under Molotov was, however, only one force within the leadership, which was, the new evidence suggests, deeply divided over the German issue. While publicly (through an *Pravda* article on May 25) calling for the convocation of a Four-Power meeting on Germany, the disagreement over German policy came to the fore at the May 27 session of the Presidium of the Soviet Council of Ministers, which attempted to “analyze the causes which had led to the mass exodus of Germans from the GDR to West Germany and to discuss measures to correct the unfavorable political and economic situation existing in the GDR.”¹⁵ At the meeting, according to still-fragmentary evidence, secret police chief Lavrenti Beria, seconded by Premier Georgi M. Malenkov, is said to have opposed the further development of socialism in the GDR, which was reportedly favored by Nikita S. Khrushchev, Molotov, and Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Possibly better informed through intelligence channels on the grave situation in East Germany, and most certainly with an eye to challenge Molotov in his own domain, Beria appears to have argued in favor of a united, neutral, democratic and bourgeois German state, although evidence on his precise views at this point is still sketchy. The Soviet leadership remained divided over the issue for several days, and even the final resolution, entitled “On measures for the recovery of the political situation in the German Democratic Republic” and dated 2 June, thinly veiled the existing differences over policy.¹⁶

The Council of Ministers’ resolution constituted a fairly realistic appraisal and harsh critique of the policy of the forced construction of socialism. It acknowledged that the mass exodus to the West of East Germans of all professions and backgrounds created “a serious danger for the continued political existence of the German Democratic Republic,” and called for an end to forced

¹² Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 43-44.

¹³ Quoted in Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 45.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Editor’s note 12, stenographic protocol, CPSU CC Plenum, 2-7 July 1953, “Delo Beria,” *Izvestia TsK KPSS* 2 (1991), 144, quoted in Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 48.

¹⁶ Richter, *Reexamining Soviet Policy*, 13-22; Zubok, *Soviet Intelligence*, 16-17; Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 48-52.

collectivization and the war on private enterprise, for the revision of the heavy industry plan, and for the relaxation of political-judicial controls and regimentation. It ordered the termination of the coercive measures against the Protestant Church and denounced the “cold exercise of power” by the Ulbricht regime. Significantly, though, it did not explicitly demand an abrogation of the controversial raised work norms. Reflecting Beria’s influence, the resolution expressed the necessity to “put the tasks of the political battle for national reunification and the conclusion of a peace treaty at the center of attention of the German people,” and stipulated that “in the future the determination of the entire political situation for this or that time period has to take into consideration the real conditions within the GDR as well as the situation in Germany as a whole and the international situation.”¹⁷

The resolution was given to SED leaders Ulbricht and Otto Grotewohl (accompanied by politburo member Fred Oelssner) during a three-day trip to Moscow (2-4 June 1953) where, as Grotewohl noted, the Soviet leaders expressed their “grave concern about the situation in the GDR.”¹⁸ Malenkov, according to Grotewohl, warned that “if we do not correct the situation now, a catastrophe will happen.”¹⁹ The East Germans were instructed to accept the reversal of course and to assume—at least publicly—the blame for the virtual failure of the forced socialization program in the GDR. At the same time, they received promises of substantial aid and relief in reparation payments which complemented the replacement of the old SCC by a new Soviet High Commission for German affairs. After having made “a bad impression in Moscow”²⁰ (Grotewohl), and after several days of intense discussion with the East German leadership in Berlin (5-9 June 1953) which turned into a critical analysis of Ulbricht’s dictatorial and myopic leadership, the SED politburo, on 11 June, published the famous communiqué announcing the “New Course.”²¹ In addition to the changes indicated in the 2 June 1953 resolution, the New Course included a general amnesty for all East German refugees, assistance to small and medium-size private enterprises, more liberal policies on interzonal travel and residence permits as well as an easing of the campaign against the Protestant Church and the re-issuance of ration cards to the middle classes.

¹⁷ The decree, “Über die Maßnahmen zur Gesundung der politischen Lage in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik,” released in 1989, is printed in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 32:5 (1990), 651-54.

¹⁸ Quoted in Rolf Stöckigt, “Ein Dokument von großer historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953” [A Document of Great Historical Importance of May 1953], *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 32:5 (1990), 649.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Wilfriede Ott, “Dokumente zur Auseinandersetzung in der SED 1953,” *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* 32:5 (1990), 655-67; Nadja Stulz-Herrnstadt, ed., *Rudolf Herrnstadt. Das Herrnstadt-Dokument. Das Politbüro der SED und die Geschichte des 17. Juni 1953* [Rudolf Herrnstadt: The Herrnstadt File. The SED Politburo and the History of 17 June 1953] (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), 62-81. See also Helmut Müller-Enbergs, *Der Fall Rudolf Herrnstadt. Tauwetterpolitik vor dem 17. Juni* [The Herrnstadt Case. Thaw Policy before 17 June] (Berlin: Linksdruck, 1991); Wettig, “Sowjetische Wiedervereinigungsbemühungen,” 947-50; Wilfried Loth, *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind. Warum Moskau die DDR nicht wollte* [Stalin’s Unwanted Child. Why Moscow Did Not Want the GDR] (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1994), 209ff.

Neither western contemporaries nor later historians realized the extent to which the sudden announcement of the “New Course” shocked party members and the general population. Large numbers of reports from local party officials to their headquarters in Berlin, the CC Department “Principal Organs of Party and Mass Organizations” under Karl Schirdewan, reveal with great candor the widespread disappointment and disbelief, the utter confusion and unrest, among both party members and the public.²² To many, the communiqué signaled the SED’s final bankruptcy. To make matters worse, the only segment of the population which seemed to have been excluded from the concessions of the “New Course” were the workers: the arbitrarily-imposed higher work norms remained in force. Politburo member Rudolf Herrnstadt, while one of Ulbricht’s strongest critics, had pleaded in vain with Semyonov on 10 June to postpone the publication of the communiqué for two weeks to have time to prepare the population for the drastic changes. The Soviet High Commissioner had refused this, warning Herrnstadt that “in fourteen days you may not have a state anymore.”²³ As an internal SED report summarized the developments, “broad segments of the population did [...] not understand the party’s new course, viewed it as a sign of weakness or even as a victory by the Americans or the Church.”²⁴

The hasty introduction of the ‘New Course’ and its inherent contradictions brought matters to a boil. On 16 June 1953, several hundred East Berlin construction workers staged a demonstration, calling for a general strike the next day. Bowing to popular pressure, the SED government retreated on the controversial question of work norms and announced that the increase would henceforth be “voluntary.” On 17 June 1953, anti-regime protests and riots took place in most major cities and towns throughout the GDR. Only the display and use of massive Soviet military force prevented the toppling of the East German regime.²⁵

* * * * *

The Eisenhower Administration had watched events in Germany with growing apprehension. This stemmed less from an expectation of the SED regime’s collapse than from a concern over their potential repercussions on West German rearmament and the impending French

²² See, e.g., Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen [Department “Principal Organs of Party and Mass Organizations”], Tagesbericht Nr. VI [Daily Report No. 6], 14 June 1953, Stiftung “Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der ehemaligen DDR” im Bundesarchiv [Foundation “Archives of the Parties and Mass Organizations of the Former GDR], henceforth SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/435. An internal SED CC report noted as early as June 12 that “the discussions among the population have become more critical, in part they have assumed an anti-party and anti-government character and are especially prominent in the rural areas.” Thus, in the city of Brandenburg, for example, 5000 people staged a demonstration in front of the municipal prison. Quoted in *42. Sitzung der Enquete-Kommission*, 26.

²³ Herrnstadt, *Das Herrnstadt-Dokument*, 74.

²⁴ Abt. Leitende Organe der Partei und der Massenorganisationen, “Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6. 1953” [Study of the Instigation, Outbreak and Crushing of the Fascist Adventure of 16-22 June 1953], 20 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, 2/5/546.

²⁵ Hagen, *DDR- Juni ‘53*, passim.

and German ratification of the European Defense Community, which at the time constituted the cornerstone of Washington's European policy.²⁶ Regarding the GDR, the expectation was that the Sovietization process would eventually lead to a strengthening of the SED regime's position vis-a-vis the East German population and the West. Rather than a sign of defiance, the growing flow of refugees pouring into Berlin was interpreted to indicate the East Germans' decreasing energy to resist and morale. The U.S. High Commissioner in Germany (HICOG) Berlin's Eastern Affairs Division reported to Washington in February 1953 that it could not be expected "that even if called upon to do so, the East Germans would be willing and capable of carrying out a revolution unless such a call coincided with a declaration of war and/or assurance of Western military support."²⁷ As late as June 2, HICOG estimated that the economic crisis brought on by collectivization and socialization was not critical: "[T]here is currently no reason to believe the situation has reached the stage of catastrophe or that the GDR Government does not have the means at its disposal to prevent it from becoming such."²⁸

Following a brief spell of confusion in the SED leadership in the wake of Stalin's death, Ulbricht and Moscow, U.S. officials believed, were again in complete harmony. They noted that the East German regime had softened its policy after Stalin's funeral in April, abandoning its violent anti-American propaganda and militarization while emphasizing the voluntary character of collectivization. But all in all, the SED apparatus was actively endeavoring "to achieve acceptance and implementation of what amounts basically the same internal SED program as before, with some slight outward modifications."²⁹ Moreover, Soviet moves in Germany, such as the appointment of Semyonov as Soviet High Commissioner on May 29, seemed to indicate that the existence of the communist regime in the GDR was guaranteed by Moscow more than ever: "Certainly no [...] abandonment of East German Republic is indicated," U.S. Ambassador to the USSR Charles "Chip" Bohlen reported to Washington.³⁰ If anything, the reorganization of the SCC was seen as "prompted in part by pressure from East Germany," whose leaders recently appeared to be in an "assertive mood."³¹ While acknowledging the imponderables inherent in the situation in the Kremlin and the possibility that Ulbricht might eventually be sacrificed by the new Soviet leaders, the Eastern Affairs Division in Berlin concluded that events in the GDR since April made Ulbricht's position "look as strong or stronger than ever."³²

²⁶ On the EDC see Thomas U. Schöttli, *USA und EVG. Truman, Eisenhower und die Europa-Armee* [USA and EDC. Truman, Eisenhower and the European Army] (Bern: Lang, 1994); Hans-Erich Volkmann and Walter Schwengler, eds., *Die europäische Verteidigungsgemeinschaft. Stand und Probleme der Forschung* [The European Defense Community. The State of Research] (Boppard: Hans Boldt, 1985).

²⁷ HICOG Berlin to Department of State, 3 February 1953, National Records Center [NRC], Suitland, MD, RG 466, HICOG Berlin, Box 3.

²⁸ HICOG Berlin to Department of State, 2 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.00/6-253.

²⁹ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 30 April 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/4-3053.

³⁰ Bohlen to Secretary of State, 29 May 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/5-2953.

³¹ Ibid.

³² HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 9 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-953.

It is symptomatic of the degree to which U.S. observers believed the SED to be in control of events that the vastly increasing influx of refugees from the East in early 1953 was initially interpreted to be a deliberate psychological warfare measure rather than a reflection of the deteriorating situation in the GDR. “It is my opinion that Commies have capabilities of cutting stream drastically,” the newly-appointed U.S. High Commissioner in Germany, James B. Conant, reported.³³ Panic therefore marked the initial American reaction to the refugee flood. In February, Conant estimated that more than 300,000 would cross the border to the West within the next hundred days.³⁴ Despite a small airlift which flew about 1000 refugees out of the city to West Germany every day, HICOG Berlin predicted that space in West Berlin was “bound to become tight” and that the “danger of epidemics as well as the “possibility of riots and disturbances inspired either by general discontent or Communists” could not be discounted.³⁵ HICOG therefore unilaterally considered plans for a “crash evacuation” of refugees utilizing military aircraft and recommended a loan to the Federal Republic with an upper limit of \$100 million.³⁶ In addition, HICOG pressed for changes in the West German refugee recognition policy which had resulted in an accumulation of a large number of non-recognized refugees who, as unemployables, constituted an intolerable burden to (West) Berlin’s economy and political stability. Faced with the possibility that the influx of refugees might reach “staggering numbers,” propelling the problem to “disaster proportions” and straining West German resources beyond their limits, Conant briefly considered abandoning the long-established policy of treating the refugee problem as a “German problem,” the burden of which had to be and could be carried by the Germans themselves.³⁷

By April, however, when West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer arrived in Washington for his first visit to the United States (and the first such visit by any German leader since the war), pleading for economic assistance in the scope of \$250 million to cope with the refugee crisis, U.S. apprehensions had been largely alleviated.³⁸ West Germany seemed able to cope with the influx economically. By that time, it had also become obvious that the refugees were causing serious embarrassment and problems for the SED. U.S. observers concluded that the Soviets had overestimated the effectiveness of propaganda and dissuasion in stemming the refugee flood but considered extreme and drastic measures politically unfeasible. If the Western Allies exercised ingenuity, imagination, and determination to prevent the refugee flow from becoming a security problem in West Berlin, they could “turn potential danger into [a] positive asset” and “embarrass

³³ Conant to Secretary of State, 27 February 1953, NA, RG 59, 862A.411/2-2753.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 5 March 1953, NA, RG 59, 862A.411/3-553.

³⁶ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 2 March 1953, NA, RG 59, 862A.411/3-253; Conant to Secretary of State, 27 February 1953, NA, RG 59, 862A.411/2-2753.

³⁷ Conant to Secretary of State, 27 February 1953, NA, RG 59, 862A.411/2-2753.

³⁸ There are indications that Conant’s views on the refugee crisis changed as early as mid-March. See Conant to Secretary of State, 12 March 1953, NA, RG 59, 862A.411/3-1253.

seriously and hurt Soviet-SED strategy and tactics in Ger[many].”³⁹ Consequently, the Eisenhower Administration stuck to established policy and denied West Germany any extra aid for the refugees and discharged its special responsibilities for Berlin by earmarking a mere \$15 million for refugee relief.⁴⁰

Rather than worrying about the further satellization of the GDR, leading U.S. officials grew increasingly alarmed over the drift towards Four-Power talks engendered by the new Soviet leadership’s “peace offensive.” Despite the forceful and aggressive foreign policy stance taken by Eisenhower and Dulles during the 1952 electoral campaign, the new administration had lacked an effective response to Stalin’s death and displayed considerable nervousness about the new Soviet peace campaign. Four-Power talks and a more conciliatory attitude on the part of the Russians would threaten the progress of Western European military integration by weakening an already ambiguous French resolve to agree to West German rearmament and by undermining the position of staunchly pro-EDC Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.⁴¹ When presidential adviser and psychological warfare specialist C.D. Jackson, in response to the Soviet peace talk, suggested that Eisenhower should make a speech emphasizing the U.S. desire to “negotiate all the major outstanding issues between the free world and the Soviet bloc, including the unification of Germany and disarmament,”⁴² Secretary of State John Foster Dulles predicted that if such a speech were given, “the governments of [Italian Prime Minister A.] de Gasperi, Adenauer and [French Premier R.] Mayer would fall in a week; and that EDC would be postponed, if not destroyed.”⁴³ Thus, all efforts were to be directed at “stav[ing] off a Russian initiative for a Foreign Ministers meeting on

³⁹ HICOG Berlin to HICOG Bonn, 4 March 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/3-453.

⁴⁰ For Adenauer’s policy on East German refugees crisis see Helge Heidemeyer, *Flucht und Zuwanderung aus der SBZ/DDR 1945/1949-1961. Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland bis zum Bau der Berliner Mauer* [Flight and Immigration from the Soviet Zone/GDR 1945/1949-1961] (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1993); and Valur Ingimundarson, “Cold War Misperceptions: The Communist and Western Responses to the East German Refugee Crisis in 1953,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29:3 (1994), 463-81.

⁴¹ The widespread discussion of a possible Russian peace offensive, Conant reported from Bonn as late as 4 May 1953, was “certainly a factor working against [the] speedy ratification of [the] EDC treaty here.” Conant to Secretary of State, 4 May 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.00/5-453. On Dulles’ policy towards Germany see Manfred Görtemaker, “John Foster Dulles und die “Neuorientierung” der amerikanischen Deutschland- und Europapolitik 1952/53” [John F. Dulles and the Re-orientation of American Policy towards Germany and Europe, 1952/53], *Amerikastudien/American Studies* 39:1 (1994), 111-36; Detlef Felken, *Dulles und Deutschland. Die amerikanische Deutschlandpolitik 1953-1959* [Dulles and Germany. American Policy towards Germany 1953-1959] (Bonn: Bouvier, 1993); Manfred Görtemaker, “John Foster Dulles und die Westintegration der Bundesrepublik Deutschland” [John Foster Dulles and the West-integration of the Federal Republic of Germany], in Rolf Steininger et al., eds., *Die doppelte Eindämmung. Europäische Sicherheit und deutsche Frage in den Fünfzigern* [Double Containment. European Security and the German Question in the 1950s] (Munich: Hase und Koehler, 1993), 9-38.

⁴² Summary of Discussion, 12 March 1953, 136th Meeting of the NSC, quoted in James D. Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality: The Eisenhower Administration and Unrest in Eastern Europe, 1953-1959*, Ph.D. dissertation (American University, 1990), 98. Marchio’s dissertation is a path-breaking and so far unmatched study of the Eisenhower Administration’s psychological strategy towards Eastern Europe.

⁴³ Quoted in Walt W. Rostow, *Europe after Stalin* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), Appendix C, p. 108; Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 100.

the German problem.”⁴⁴ Delicately balancing hardline skepticism with a more conciliatory approach toward the post-Stalin leadership in Moscow, Eisenhower’s “Chance for Peace” speech of April 16, 1953 cautiously made any détente in U.S.-Soviet relations contingent upon Kremlin concessions such as free elections in Eastern Europe or the signing of an Austrian peace treaty.⁴⁵

It was British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who, though initially rather dubious about a Soviet change of heart, was more willing to explore potential opportunities which seemed possible with the change of leadership, thus breaking with the skeptical and reserved reception which Moscow’s peace offensive had met in the West. On April 20, Churchill not only backed the U.S. “initiative” but also indicated that he favored high-level talks with the new Soviet leadership. Following the *Pravda* article of April 25, which had signaled Russian willingness for talks on Germany, the British Prime Minister, in a speech in Parliament on May 16, boldly called for a “conference on the highest level [...] between the leading powers without delay,” holding out the possibility of “a generation of peace.”⁴⁶

In going well beyond Eisenhower’s “deeds, not words” approach, Churchill was primarily motivated by his belief that a negotiated settlement was necessary to prevent nuclear war and that the new Soviet leadership was amenable to personal diplomacy. Moreover, the prime minister felt that the West could now negotiate from a position of strength and that Eisenhower was thus also ready for negotiations. Indeed, Churchill was afraid Eisenhower would himself take advantage of the moment, thus receiving the political credit which Churchill sought for himself and his country. Churchill’s speech was received enthusiastically in Europe, and on May 21, Churchill was able to announce that a Western summit would take place in Bermuda in June, a move which was widely perceived to be preparatory to a meeting with the Russians.⁴⁷

Though it had grudgingly consented to preparatory talks, the Eisenhower Administration reacted coolly to Churchill’s ardor for renewed East-West negotiations, and responded with comparable skepticism when the SED politburo announced its dramatic reversal of policy. In view of Soviet tactics in East Germany since September 1951, the potential disruptive effect on upcoming elections in the Federal Republic, and the specter of losing momentum on EDC ratification, U.S. intelligence estimates concluded that the “recent Soviet move in [the] GDR, coupled with [the] Korean Armistice and other Soviet moves on world [the] chess board, represent

⁴⁴ Minutes, NSC meeting of 28 April 1953, in U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, V, 399. (Hereafter *FRUS* with year and volume number.)

⁴⁵ For Eisenhower’s speech see *FRUS, 1952-1954*, II (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1984), 1699-1706.

⁴⁶ On Churchill’s summit initiative, see Klaus W. Larres, *Politik der Illusionen. Churchill, Eisenhower und die deutsche Frage 1945-1955* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995), 91-154, and M. Steven Fish, “After Stalin’s Death: The Anglo-American Debate Over a New Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 10 (1986), 335.

⁴⁷ Larres, *Politik der Illusionen*; Fish, “After Stalin’s Death,” 337-339. On the development of the Bermuda Conference, which was postponed until December, see John W. Young, “Churchill, the Russians and the Western Alliance: The Three-Power Conference at Bermuda, December 1953,” *English Historical Review* 101 (1986), 889-912.

a tactical and not [...] strategic shift in Germany.”⁴⁸ The CIA estimated that while the announcement of the New Course was designed to cope with the growing popular unrest and suggested at least an attempt to resolve the refugee problem, the Soviets’ real intention was to “soften Western skepticism.”⁴⁹ In the State Department, the measures taken by the Ulbricht regime were regarded as “part of a build-up for a Soviet proposal for Four Power talks, probably on Germany” which were designed to “convince the world that [the] Soviet Union is prepared to compromise on Germany and that Western Powers should therefore enter into talks with [the] Soviet Union before proceeding with the rearmament of the Federal Republic through EDC.”⁵⁰

Coming on the heels of Churchill’s May 16 call for a great power summit, Soviet moves in Germany to were expected to “increase pressure for Four Power talks.”⁵¹ Given the politically tense atmosphere in the Federal Republic, no political party could afford public opposition to the principle of a four-power meeting, regardless of the prospects of its success. “Even [the] Chancellor and the CDU are shifting to half-hearted public support for talks,”⁵² U.S. officials in Bonn observed, despite their known private opposition to talks prior to the elections. Faced with exploitation of the issue by the opposition Social Democratic Party, Adenauer “hopes to get US support in his aim of delaying talks.”⁵³

Instead of putting the Soviet peace offensive to the test, Eisenhower and Dulles remained convinced that the right response was increased pressure. “This was not the time for us to be soft,”⁵⁴ Dulles argued. “[I]f we keep our pressures on, psychological and otherwise, we may either force a collapse of the Kremlin regime or else transform the Soviet orbit from a union of satellites dedicated to aggression, into a coalition for defense only.”⁵⁵ This was especially true with regard to Eastern Germany.

Since the late Truman Administration, various U.S. government agencies had been engaged in psychological warfare activities in Germany aimed at a reduction of Soviet power and the collapse of the local Communist regime, thus attempting to add a more active component to the “magnet theory” and the “non-recognition doctrine” which constituted the foundations of U.S. policy towards the GDR. In late 1950, a secret report by State Department consultants Wallace

⁴⁸ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 15 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1553.

⁴⁹ CIA, Office of Current Intelligence, 11 June 1953, DDEL, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library (Abilene, Kansas) [henceforth DDEL], C.D. Jackson Records, Box 3.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Gen. Persons to Robert L. Schulz for the President, 11 June 1953, Dwight D. Eisenhower Papers [DDEP], Ann Whitman File, International Series, Box 14. See also Samuel Reber to Secretary of State, 11 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.00/6-1153.

⁵² HICOG Bonn to Secretary of State, 13 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.00/6-1353.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Tel Con Judd-Dulles, 28 March 1953, Seely G. Mudd Library, John Foster Dulles Papers, Box 72.

⁵⁵ Special meeting of the National Security Council, 13 March 1953, DDEL, DDEP (Ann Whitman File), NSC series, box 4; Felken, *Dulles und Deutschland*, 171.

Carroll and Hans Speier (henceforth the Carroll-Speier-Report)⁵⁶ had proclaimed that “aggressive psychological warfare waged with a fixed purpose will advance us toward our objective,” and called for implementation of a whole series of overt and covert tactical projects, ranging from military demonstrations, sabotage, abductions and assassinations to propaganda infiltration and “Operation Debunk,” a concerted effort to undermine Soviet-propagated myths. Based on classified vulnerability studies of the East German state, it proposed economic warfare in the form of trade restrictions and by depriving the GDR economy of key personnel. Criticizing the lack of cooperation and coordination between various West German agencies and anti-Communist groups committed to opposition work in East Germany, the report, most importantly, suggested the U.S.-sponsored creation of a “unified, strong, growing resistance movement within the Soviet zone, which has a name, is secure and disciplined, acts according to plan, and awaits its time.”⁵⁷

Based on the Carroll-Speier-Report and other blueprints for fighting the Cold War in Germany, the Psychological Strategy Board, by October 1952, had drawn up and adopted a comprehensive psychological warfare plan (PSB D-21) which outlined propaganda efforts directed against the East German Communists.⁵⁸ PSB D-21 called for a concerted and stepped-up effort to expose oppressive conditions in the GDR and to encourage disaffection and defection. The plan envisioned psychological, political, and economic harassment of the GDR as well as “controlled preparation for more active resistance.”⁵⁹ In implementing these objectives, U.S. policy makers closely cooperated with already existing German organizations such as the “Free Jurists Committee” and the “Fighting Group Against Inhumanity,” the Protestant Church, and the so-called East Bureaus of the West German political parties.⁶⁰

To most U.S. policy makers at the time, the “most effective instrument we have to penetrate behind the Soviet curtain”⁶¹ appeared to be the American radio station in Berlin, RIAS.⁶² Controlled by HICOG but staffed mainly with German personnel, RIAS was extremely popular among East Germans. U.S. intelligence estimated that more than 70 percent listened in on a regular basis.⁶³ Widely regarded as the “only source of objective news available to the population”⁶⁴ of

⁵⁶ Wallace Carroll and Hans Speier, “Psychological Warfare in Germany. A Report to the United States High Commissioner for Germany and the Department of State, 1 December 1950, NA, RG 466, box 3:352 (FOIA to author).

⁵⁷ Ibid. For a critical review of covert operations under the late Truman administration, see Beatrice Heuser, “Subversive Operationen im Dienste der ‘Roll-Back’-Politik 1948-1953” [Subversive Activities in the Service of “Roll-Back” Policy, 1948-1953], *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 37:2 (1989), 280-97.

⁵⁸ Paper presented by the PSB, PSB D-21, 9 October 1952, *FRUS* 1952-1954, VII, Part 1, 370-380; see also Boerner to Kellermann, 20 February 1953, NA, RG 59, 511.62a/2-2053. I am obliged to William Burr (National Security Archive, Washington, DC) for drawing my attention to the declassification of this document.

⁵⁹ HICOG Bonn to Department of State, 3 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 511.62A/6-353 (declassified in January 1994).

⁶⁰ On the SPD Ostbüro see Wolfgang Buschfort, *Das Ostbüro der SPD. Von der Gründung bis zur Berlin-Krise* [The Eastbureau of the SPD: From Its Establishment to the Berlin Crisis] (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1991).

⁶¹ McCloy to Secretary of State, 24 August 1950, NA, RG 59, 511.62B4/8-2450.

⁶² Shortly before the uprising, RIAS had started transmitting from Hof on the Bavarian/GDR border as well.

⁶³ Hagen, *DDR - Juni '53*, 30.

East Germany, RIAS, as the first U.S. High Commissioner, John J. McCloy, had put it, constituted “the spiritual and psychological center of resistance in a Communist-dominated, blacked-out area”⁶⁵ and “poison to the Communists.”⁶⁶ In addition, RIAS cooperated with U.S. intelligence agencies operating in Berlin to collect intelligence data and facilitated the “recruitment of covert sources and agents in the Soviet Zone.”⁶⁷

RIAS played an important role before and during the 17 June uprising. While neither RIAS nor any other US government agency instigated the demonstrations, according to available evidence, RIAS certainly encouraged resistance. In the weeks preceding the uprising, RIAS frequently reported on the labor unrest and, commenting on successful strikes, come close to giving instructions for rebellion. Its broadcasts on 16-17 June, which informed listeners of the latest reports of resistance activities, were instrumental in spreading the uprising.

The radio station’s significance as an “alternative public opinion” within the GDR can be discerned from internal SED reports. Various reports pointed to the widespread and in fact increasing reception of RIAS (“im starken Anwachsen des Riashörens”) in the spring of 1953.⁶⁸ After the announcement of the New Course, local party officials reported increasing numbers of statements like “All stations were lying, Rias alone says the truth, our shackles are broken, we are free people again.”⁶⁹ A report on the situation on June 17 in Leipzig noted the “many Rias listeners” among the workers.⁷⁰ The population, it was reported, “at present turns to the Western *Hetzsender* [propaganda stations] in growing numbers.” The Communist Union Agricultural and Forest Workers communicated to Berlin that “every single one of our apprentices listens to Rias and NWDR [Northwest German Radio], because some are of the opinion that there is at least some truth to what these stations broadcast.”⁷¹ Indeed, as another report noted, the “confusion” caused by the June 17 riots was so great that even SED party members demanded—without initially incurring any opposition—that the reception of RIAS be legalized and freely allowed.⁷²

⁶⁴ Burton B. Lifschultz, CIA-Eastern European Division to Allen Dulles, 10 July 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 74.

⁶⁵ McCloy to Secretary of State, 24 August 1950, NA, RG 59, 511.62B4/8-2450.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ M.C. Partridge, Major General, G-2, to Allen Dulles, 3 August 1953, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 74, DDEL.

⁶⁸ Abt. Leitende Organe der Partei und der Massenorganisationen, “Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteuers vom 16.-22.6. 1953,” 20 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, 2/5/546; Durchsage der B[ezirks] L[eitung] Leipzig [Report of the District Headquarters], 18 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Information über die Situation in Leipzig und Espenhain am 17.6.1953 [Information on the Situation in Leipzig and Espenhain on 17 June 1953], 18 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

⁷¹ Zentralvorstand Gewerkschaft Land und Forst [Central Headquarters of the Agricultural and Forest Workers’ Union], Teilbericht über die derzeitige Lage [Report on the Current Situation], 23 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch 2/5/543.

⁷² Bericht über die Entwicklung seit dem 17.6. im Bezirk Potsdam [Report on the Developments in the Potsdam District Since 17 June], n.d., SAPMO-BArch 2/5/561; Information über die Situation in Leipzig und Espenhain am 17.6.1953, 18 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

Using information by workers from the Stalin Allee construction site, RIAS reported as early as the evening of June 15 that protests strikes were being staged against the increase in work norms. Broadcast in the late evening and then again in the early morning hours of June 16 when reception throughout the zone peaked, these reports were based on scanty evidence which initially led other radio stations not to repeat them. By noon (June 16), reports from various sources confirmed that demonstrations at the Stalin construction site had continued in the morning hours. After a short announcement to that effect on the 1:00 p.m. news broadcast, RIAS finally gave a lengthy account of the day's events in the Soviet Sector at 4:30 p.m.. Unimpeded by the East German People's Police, crowds of demonstrators in front of the House of Ministries, RIAS reported, had not only demanded price cuts and a rescission of the higher work quotas, but shouted: "We want free elections."⁷³

Not surprisingly, it was RIAS to which the East Berlin workers turned on the afternoon of June 16, requesting assistance in spreading their call for a general strike the next day.⁷⁴ RIAS officials were aware that the rebelling workers expected the radio station to be their central coordinating point. Only RIAS could establish an effective link between striking workers and the general population. One of the worker delegates later recalled that they expected RIAS' unmitigated support for their strike, followed by an Allied (Western) invasion to reestablish order.⁷⁵

Without effective consultation with Washington or HICOG Bonn, RIAS officials opted for caution. Mindful of the warning by HICOG's Eastern Affairs Element chief Charles Hulick that night—"I hope you know what you are doing. You could start a war this way"⁷⁶—RIAS political director Gordon Ewing decided that the station could not lend itself as a mouthpiece to the workers, yet would factually and fully disseminate information about the demonstrations.⁷⁷ Ewing also refused to issue a call for a general strike as demanded by the workers' delegation. RIAS' 7:30 p.m. evening news on June 16 featured the demonstrations, and also reported that a delegation of construction workers had submitted a resolution for publication. The resolution stated that the workers had proved by their strike and demonstration that "they were able to force the government to accept their justified demands." The workers would, the resolution continued, "make use of their power at any time" if their demands for lower quotas, price cuts, free elections, and indemnity for all demonstrators were rejected. The workers were said to have been determined to continue

⁷³*Der Aufstand der Arbeiterschaft im Ostsektor von Berlin und in der sowjetischen Besatzungszone. Tätigkeitsbericht der Hauptabteilung Politik des Rundfunks im Amerikanischen Sektor in der Zeit vom 16. Juni bis zum 23. Juni 1953* [copy in Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Nachlaß J. Kaiser, NL 18/314], 3.

⁷⁴HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 16 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1653.

⁷⁵Hagen, *DDR*, 97.

⁷⁶The quote is from Steward Alsop, "Courage in Berlin and Its Reward," *New York Times*, 20 July 1953. The name and details are given in an interview by Ewing, printed in Spittmann and Fricke, *17. Juni 1953. Arbeiteraufstand in der DDR*, 234-37. See also Hildebrandt, *The Explosion*, 46-69; D. Prowe, *Weltstadt in Krisen. Berlin 1949-1958* [Metropolis in Times of Crisis. Berlin 1949-1958] (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1973), 113.

⁷⁷HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 16 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1653; "Bericht über die Geschehnisse am Mittwoch, dem 17. Juni 1953" [Report on the Events on Wednesday, 17 June 1953], n.d., SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

their strike and convinced that “strikes and demonstrations would not be limited to the workers of the Stalin Allee site.”⁷⁸

The gray zone between encouragement and “factual reporting” was obvious in RIAS’ nightly comment by program director Eberhard Schütz. The regime’s backing down on the norm question was “a victory, which our Ostberliner share with the entire working population of the Soviet Zone.” The regime would have never reacted as quickly as it did, Schütz argued, if the workers had not shown their opposition in discussions, passive resistance, and strikes throughout the zone. The East Berlin workers had not limited their demands to the question of work quotas but had indeed demanded the resignation of the Pankow regime and Western-style liberties. “We would be unworldly and would not deserve the confidence of our listeners if we could not acknowledge the justice of the demands. [...] What the population of East Berlin and the Soviet Zone demands today and what it views as feasible is nothing less than the end to the totalitarian rule of the Kremlin’s German satellites.” Emphasizing that “everyone had to know himself how far he could go,” Schütz encouraged his listeners to support the demonstrators. “It is your task today to show the Soviet and German rulers that we do not accept ‘mistakes’ anymore as mistakes. That we and you expect a change of mind which is not limited to a rescission of the ten percent increase in work norms but which creates conditions for free decisions which go way beyond the so-called ‘voluntary norm increases’. We,” Schütz concluded, “would be happy to be able to report more such victories in the next days.”⁷⁹

While Federal Minister for All-German Questions Jacob Kaiser, in a late night broadcast, reminded his East German compatriots to shy away from provocations, RIAS late-night news at 11 p.m.—and, in change of its usual schedule, from then on in hourly broadcasts—repeated the workers’ demand to continue the strike the next day, calling specifically for all East Berliners to participate in a demonstration at seven the next morning at the centrally-located Strausberger Platz.⁸⁰ In the early morning hours, West Berlin labor leader Ernst Scharnowski reassured the demonstrators that West German unions stood behind their colleagues and called upon the population for support: “Don’t leave them alone. They are fighting not only for the social rights of labor but for the human rights of everyone in the East Zone. Join the movement of East Berlin construction workers, of East Berlin tram and rail employees! Every town has its Strausberger Platz!”⁸¹ Within the Eisenhower Administration, RIAS was later credited for the swiftness with which the strikes and disorders spread from East Berlin throughout the Zone, thus pushing the riots beyond a local crisis. A CIA report stated that “competent observers feel that the RIAS broadcasts

⁷⁸ *Der Aufstand*, 5; see also the testimony of Wilhelm Grothaus, in “Augenzeugenberichte von streikenden Arbeitern,” 17. Juni 1953, 360.

⁷⁹ *Der Aufstand*, 6.

⁸⁰ *Der Aufstand*, 6.

⁸¹ *Der Aufstand*, 8; Hildebrandt, *The Explosion*, 66; HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 17 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1753.

of the first unrest in East Berlin acted as a signal for the additional uprisings in the other German communities.”⁸²

High-level SED analyses initially underrated the effect the RIAS broadcasts had produced. According to some reports reaching the GDR leadership, RIAS broadcasts during the first days of the crisis were “very general.” Confirming the genuine and spontaneous nature of the demonstrations, SED officials took satisfaction in the fact that “the enemy is still lacking detailed information.”⁸³ The radio station’s initial emphasis on caution and restraint, contributing to a large degree to the relaxation of the tense situation in the city, was clearly recognized by GDR authorities.⁸⁴

This, however, did not preclude GDR officials from holding the Americans responsible for the uprising. According to an internal report of 17 June 1953, located in the Ulbricht papers, “without doubt the [Western] occupation powers, obviously the Americans,” deserved “considerable credit for the provocation of the unrest.” As a basis for this allegation the report cited “the distribution of propaganda leaflets by airplanes.”⁸⁵ It did not take the SED long before it realized the crucial significance of RIAS broadcasts for the spreading of the uprising. An internal SED study on “The Role of the Hostile Broadcasting during the Events in Berlin” blamed RIAS broadcasts for creating the “impression” that “the strikes of the construction workers [in East Berlin] were becoming a broad movement among the entire population.” A part of the population, the report stated, “was put into a state of panic by the RIAS slogans.”⁸⁶

From the point of view of the regime, RIAS pressure did not seem to subside after the initial demonstrations but was in fact “increasing its propaganda against party and government.”⁸⁷ Particularly alarming was the heavy play given by the American radio to the food shortages. By

⁸² Burton B. Lifschultz, CIA-Eastern European Division, to Allen Dulles, 10 July 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 74.

⁸³ Minutes, Politburo Meeting, 26 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2/305, IV 2/2/363; Abteilung Presse und Rundfunk, “Zweite Analyse über die Sendungen von RIAS und NWDR am 18. 6. 1953” [Second Analysis of the Broadcasts of RIAS and NWDR], 18 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, J IV 2/202/14.

⁸⁴ “Über die Lage am 17.6.1953 in Groß-Berlin und der DDR,” 17 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, J IV 2/202/14.

⁸⁵ Ibid. It is still unclear how seriously the SED leadership and the Soviets took their own propaganda. There is evidence that Semyonov and Marshall S.W. Sokolovsky, Chairman of the Soviet Chiefs of Staff and deputy defense minister, who had been sent to the Soviet army headquarters in Karlshorst on June 17, at least, accepted GDR Interior Ministry reports which alleged a “very active organizational role of the American military in the disorders in Berlin. The people arrested testify that American officers personally selected and gathered residents of West Berlin in large groups and gave them instructions to organize disorders in East Berlin, the arson of buildings etc. As a reward, the American officers promised money, and for the people who were the most active -- a three month vacation in a vacation home, etc. American military people personally gave instructions from cars with loudspeakers to the participants in the disorders near the home of the GDR government on the border of the Soviet sector. There is also information from the GDR provinces of American agents from West Berlin and West Germany sent there.” Semyonov and Sololovsky, telegram to Molotov and Bulganin, 19 June 1953, quoted in Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 85.

⁸⁶ “Die Rolle des feindlichen Rundfunks bei den Ereignissen in Berlin” [The Role of Hostile Broadcasts During the Events in Berlin], 21 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

⁸⁷ Fünfte Analyse über die Sendung von RIAS und NWDR am 19.6.1953,” 19 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL90/437.

deploring the “severe food crisis,” hostile radio stations were “obviously attempting to cause panic purchases among the population thus causing an actual crisis.” A RIAS statement to the effect that the New Course shift of resources from heavy to light industry should enable a notable improvement in the availability of consumer goods was interpreted to “obviously prepare the grounds for proving in due time that the government’s measures were empty promises.” Equally threatening was RIAS’ relentless demand for re-election of the Volkskammer.⁸⁸

In an effort to regain the ideological offensive, the SED soon charged American and West German provocateurs openly with the instigation of what it called “Day X.” In a lead article in the party organ *Neues Deutschland* on June 19, the demonstrations were ascribed to the long-prepared, well-orchestrated machinations of U.S. agents, thus setting the line for the 14th CC Plenum and the ensuing propaganda drive. In the secret official SED analysis of the uprising, drafted in preparation for the 15th SED CC Plenum at the end of July, “hostile forces under the direct participation and guidance of American agencies and of the popular enemies and warmongers in Bonn” were blamed for attempting “a fascist coup”:

Besides the long-standing efforts of their agencies and connections in the GDR and their daily propaganda attacks by radio, leaflets and printed press, these hostile forces increased their hostile subversive activity after the death of Comrade Stalin. [...] With the publication of the politburo communiqué of 9 June 1953, the enemies multiplied their subversive efforts and they succeeded in developing the opinion among broad segments of the population that the communiqué was a sign of weakness or even bankruptcy of party and government and in winning over not a few adherents for the demand for the punishment of the regime.

Supported by their existing spy centers in the GDR and by those groups of agents smuggled in during the uprising, and under cover of the dissatisfaction among the population resulting from the mistakes of party and regime, they temporarily managed to rope in broad segments of workers and employees, in particular in Berlin and Central Germany, for their criminal goals.⁸⁹

RIAS’ ambivalent policy during the uprising was indicative of the overall response by the Eisenhower Administration. While acknowledging that the brutal suppression of the popular uprising by Soviet military might afforded the United States an “excellent propaganda opportunity,”⁹⁰ the Eisenhower Administration took no steps to escalate the crisis. The CIA’s Berlin station chief, Henry Hecksher, cabled Washington seeking permission to supply the rioters

⁸⁸ Abteilung Presse und Rundfunk, “Kurze Analyse der Abendsendungen des gegenerischen Rundfunks vom 24.6. und der Frühsendungen vom 25.6.1953” [Short Analysis of the Evening Broadcasts of the Hostile Radio Stations of 24 June and the Morning Broadcasts of 25 June 1953], 25 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

⁸⁹ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Analyse über die Vorbereitung, den Ausbruch und die Niederschlagung des faschistischen Abenteurers vom 16.-22.6.1953,” 20 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/546.

⁹⁰ State Department to HICOG Bonn, 17 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1753.

with arms in the face of overwhelming Soviet firepower, but was instructed to limit support to “sympathy and asylum, but no arms.”⁹¹ To some extent, this was due to initial uncertainty about the demonstrations. Berlin HICOG officials had in fact at first wondered whether the Soviets had deliberately instigated the rebellion in order to create a convenient excuse to remove hard-line East German party chief Ulbricht or to move military forces into East Berlin in preparation for the capture of all of Berlin.⁹²

Meeting at 11 a.m. on June 17, even before the Soviet declaration of martial law, the Western Berlin Commandants “agreed that their mission in Berlin was to maintain law and order.”⁹³ West Berliners and Soviet Zone residents, they decided, “should if possible be dissuaded from mixing in East Berlin demonstrations where serious possibility of bloodshed existed.”⁹⁴ Allied troops and West Berlin police sealed off the city center along the sector boundary and prevented further crowds from moving to the scenes of action.⁹⁵ Convinced that a SPD-sponsored solidarity demonstration scheduled for the evening of June 17 near the sector border would appear provocative, the Commandants ordered a change in site and reminded Acting West Berlin Mayor W. Conrad and the head of the West Berlin police, J. Stumm, “that the status of Berlin is Allied responsibility,” warning of the “grave consequences” of circumventing Allied authority.⁹⁶ Moreover, the U.S. Commandant took the unprecedented step of “dissuading” Ernst Reger, editor of the popular Berlin daily *Tagesspiegel*, “from publishing inflammatory editorials.”⁹⁷

Allied concerns about inflammatory speeches and possibly provocative actions by West Germans in support of their compatriots were soon allayed. Speaking before the Bundestag later on June 17, Adenauer professed sympathy with the demonstrators but warned of the further spread and escalation of irresponsible violence and rioting, a line echoed in the following hours and days by most public representatives in the Federal Republic.⁹⁸ Berlin’s charismatic Lord Mayor Ernst Reuter, one of the most widely respected West German politicians throughout the Soviet Zone and an activist in reputation, was at an international meeting of mayors in Vienna on the day of the uprising. According to his own testimony, the Allies delayed his return to Berlin for 48 hours, a fact which he later attributed to “passivity, fear of incident, or lack of responsibility.”⁹⁹

⁹¹ Quoted in Thomas Powers, *The Man Who Kept the Secrets: Richard Helms and the CIA* (New York: Pocket Books, 1979, 1981), 55-56, cited in James G. Hershberg, “‘Explosion in the Offing’: German Rearmament and American Diplomacy,” *Diplomatic History* 16:4 (Fall 1992), 523.

⁹² Working Paper Prepared in the Eastern Affairs Division, Berlin Element, HICOG, 25 June 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 2:1595.

⁹³ HICOG Berlin/Berlin to Secretary of State, 17 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.0221/6-1753.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ Prowe, *Weltstadt in Krisen*, 116.

⁹⁶ HICOG Berlin/Berlin to Secretary of State, 17 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.0221/6-1753.

⁹⁷ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 23 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.00/6-2353.

⁹⁸ On Adenauer’s reaction, see Hans Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer. Der Staatsmann 1952-1967* [Adenauer. The Statesman 1952-1967] (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1991), 84.

⁹⁹ Prowe, *Weltstadt in Krisen*, 116.

Contrary to Churchill, who, afraid of what damage the uprising would do to his hopes for four-power negotiations, was intent on getting back to business as usual in Berlin,¹⁰⁰ and to the French, who favored a “policy of watchful waiting,”¹⁰¹ the Eisenhower Administration soon felt pressured to formulate a more positive and forceful response to the uprising. There are indications that this view emerged as early as 18 June, when the three Western Berlin Commandants issued a joint communiqué in order to counter Communist allegations that the Western Allies were provoking the disorders. While the Commandants expressed their “grave concern” and denounced the Soviets’ “irresponsible recourse to military force,”¹⁰² the British Commandant noted that he barely “succeeded in defeating the American desire to insert in the statement words which would have implied that the Allies approved of the riots.”¹⁰³

But even the toned-down version provoked a violent reaction by Churchill. Noting earlier reports of restrained Soviet behavior, he harshly reprimanded the British Commandant, asserting that “if the Soviet Government, as the occupying Power, were faced as you have described with widespread movements of violent disorders they surely have the right to declare Martial Law in order to prevent anarchy and if they acted in your words [...] ‘with marked restraint and moderation’ this is no reason for making statements [as contained in the Commandants’ statement]. We shall not find our way out of our many difficulties by making for purposes of local propaganda statements which are not in accordance with the facts.”¹⁰⁴ Yet, when the Commandants decided to issue another statement on June 24, the Americans again were inclined to use language with the intention “no doubt to make it considerably stiffer.”¹⁰⁵ British officials also showed concern about the American sector, “where the propagandists do not always seem to be under control.”¹⁰⁶ Acting Foreign Minister Lord Salisbury soon warned of the “new and more dangerous American tendency [...] to interpret the situation behind the Iron Curtain as already very shaky and therefore to

¹⁰⁰ On British policy during the uprising see Klaus Larres, “Neutralisierung oder Westintegration. Churchill, Adenauer, die USA und der 17. Juni 1953” [Neutralization or Integration into the West: Churchill, the USA and the 17 June 1953], *Deutschland Archiv* 26:6 (1993), 568-83; Michael Gehler, “Der 17. Juni 1953 aus der Sicht des Foreign Office” [17 June in the View of the Foreign Office], *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 25 (June 1993), 22-31; John W. Young, “Cold War and Détente With Moscow,” in John W. Young, ed., *The Foreign Policy of Churchill’s Peacetime Government, 1951-55* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), 55-80; Fish, “After Stalin’s Death,” 333-55; Rolf Steininger, “Ein vereinigtes, unabhängiges Deutschland? Winston Churchill, der kalte Krieg und die deutsche Frage im Jahre 1953” [A Unified Independent Germany? Winston Churchill, the Cold War, and the German Question in the Year 1953], *Militärgeschichtliche Mitteilungen* 36:2 (1984), 105-144; Joseph Foschepoth, “Churchill, Adenauer und die Neutralisierung Deutschlands” [Churchill, Adenauer, and the Neutralization of Germany], *Deutschland Archiv* 17:12 (1984), 1286-1301.

¹⁰¹ Dillon/Paris to Secretary of State, 24 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.0221/6-2453.

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Tel., Ward to Foreign Office [henceforth FO], 20 June 1953, Public Record Office [henceforth PRO], Kew Gardens, England, FO/371/103840, CS 1016/85.

¹⁰⁴ Tel. 168, Personal from Prime Minister to Coleman, 22 June 1953, PRO, FO/371/103840, CS 1016/85.

¹⁰⁵ FO Minute, Roberts to Strang, 23 June 1953, PRO, FO/371/103841, CS 1016/116.

¹⁰⁶ Tel. 564, Ward to FO, 22 June 1953, PRO, FO/371/103840, CS 1016/90.

advocate new although unspecified measures to encourage and even promote an early liberation of the satellite countries.”¹⁰⁷

The toughening stance of American officials in Washington and Germany cannot only be explained by the fact that their restrained actions during the first days of the uprising seemed hardly consistent with Eisenhower’s and Dulles’ liberation rhetoric on which the expectations of many East Germans had been based. What was even more alarming to them was that the uprising had undercut their agenda for Germany. The announcement of the New Course and the ensuing uprising threw the issue of German reunification to the forefront of the election campaign in the Federal Republic, and calls for Four Power talks were gaining momentum. “In addition to bringing back in increased strength the feeling that something must be done to unify Germany,” HICOG Bonn reported, the riots had also “created the new feeling that something can be done.”¹⁰⁸ In East Germany, the June 9 communiqué had widely been considered as a step towards unification. To the SED’s dismay, many East Germans regarded the ruling party’s conciliatory moves to be the fruit of Western pressure—“that they over there finally succeeded in forcing a change of course here,”¹⁰⁹ as one internal SED report put it. On several occasions, local SED party officials reported to Berlin instances such as the one communicated by the party district headquarters in Seehausen (Magdeburg): “The entire village is in the pub, drunk, drinking to the health of Adenauer.”¹¹⁰

Interpreting the regime’s retreat as a response to American pressure, many East Germans anticipated active Western support. In many discussions, SED officials around the country reported to party headquarters in Berlin, the population expressed the expectation that “the Soviet army, under pressure from the Western powers, was leaving the territories west of the Elbe, [...] the regime had fled to Russia, and American and British occupation forces would soon victoriously enter the area.”¹¹¹ Others uttered that “this is the beginning, slowly we are acquiring Western conditions,” and: “The SED has to go, it is time, they have run the country down. Soon we can start learning English.”¹¹² As late as August, rumors of an impending U.S. intervention led farmers to refuse further deliveries: “When the American comes, we will get more money for our cattle and will be able to afford more with it.”¹¹³ Indeed, the SED estimates on the population’s state of mind

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Fish, “After Stalin’s Death,” 343.

¹⁰⁸ HICOG Bonn to Department of State, 6 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/7-653; also Hershberg, “Explosion in the Offing,” 528-31.

¹⁰⁹ Stellungnahme der Parteiorgane nach dem 9./11.6. 1953 [Reports of the Party Organs after 9/11 June 1953], n.d., SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/526.

¹¹⁰ Telefonische Durchsage der Kreisleitung Seehausen [Telephone Communication of the Regional Headquarters in Seehausen], 11 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/526.

¹¹¹ Information der Kreisleitung Oldenburg [Information of the Regional Party Headquarters in Oldenburg], 12 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/526; see also Stimmungsbericht von Magdeburg [Situation Report from Magdeburg], 12 June 1953, *ibid.*

¹¹² FDGB-Bundesvorstand [Federation of Free German Unions, Board of Directors], Vertrauliche Information [Confidential Information] Nr. 21, 13 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/543.

¹¹³ Quoted in Dralle, “*Das DSF-Archiv*,” 841.

reflect that, until late that summer, most East Germans were convinced that the West would not ignore their outcry.¹¹⁴

The Eisenhower Administration was well aware of these expectations. There was a strong feeling that “whether the SED suffers [a] further, perhaps crippling setback or substantially recovers [its] former power position (which could happen within the next six months) may depend largely on US policy.”¹¹⁵ Already, there was public criticism of Western inaction, in particular of Adenauer’s reserved response to the uprising. As C.D. Jackson, the presidential adviser for psychological warfare, put it in a memorandum to Eisenhower, “unless some sign is forthcoming very soon from the United States there could be a terrible letdown in both East and West Germany, which will seriously affect the U.S. position and even more seriously affect Adenauer’s position.”¹¹⁶ Others argued that if the U.S. response remained limited to press comments and statements, “we risk not only to lose the confidence of the Soviet Zone population, but may even cause considerable antagonism.”¹¹⁷

Moreover, while the forceful suppression of the popular revolt had in the eyes of the Eisenhower Administration upset the Soviets’ “entire German gambit,”¹¹⁸ and impaired the Soviet negotiating position, the “extent to which demonstrations and resultant repressive measures may deflect Soviet-GDR moderation pose” remained unclear.¹¹⁹ Washington was still concerned that “the Soviets might nevertheless make [a] bid to capitalize on current East and West German demand for unification by calling for [a] conference allegedly pointed at satisfying this demand.”¹²⁰ Hence, crucial importance was ascribed to “keep[ing] [the] Soviets as much as possible on defensive, with aim of endeavoring [to] deflate any further gestures they may make at conciliation.”¹²¹ HICOG officials had noticed the “recognition and appreciation of the strikers and demonstrators of the fact that the Soviet soldiers maintained remarkable reserve, that there was no wanton shooting into the crowds.” Thus, many demonstrators believed that “maybe it is not impossible to negotiate with the Soviets.” HICOG officials thus concluded that if such a feeling is widespread or should grow, “it could have a significant effect upon East German attitudes vis-a-vis the Soviets and the western Allies, shifting, perhaps, their bitterness somewhat away from the former and directing it toward the latter, particularly if the West does nothing positive to bring

¹¹⁴ See Mitter statement, 42. *Sitzung der Enquete-Kommission*, 79.

¹¹⁵ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 29 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/7-2953.

¹¹⁶ C.D. Jackson to Eisenhower, 3 July 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 41. For a brief biography of Jackson see H.W. Brands, Jr., *Cold Warriors. Eisenhower’s Generation and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 117-37; Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 95-96.

¹¹⁷ Memo, John Albert to Ned Roberts and Brad Connors, 18 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1853. See also Memo, Revey to Kellermann, 18 June 1953, *ibid.* *New York Times*, 29 June 1953.

¹¹⁸ C.D. Jackson to John F. Dulles, 8 August 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 40.

¹¹⁹ Department of State to HICOG Bonn, 16 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/6-1653.

¹²⁰ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 22 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/6-2253.

¹²¹ State to HICOG Bonn, 16 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/6-1653.

about unification.”¹²² Indeed, as Conant warned from Bonn, unless some action was taken in the near future, the “Soviet might regain control of the situation and recoup a major part of [their] lost prestige.”¹²³

In Washington, discussions in the NSC the day after the uprising were marked by a realization that the uprising—while a “sign of real promise,” especially considering that, as CIA director Allen W. Dulles pointed out, “the United States had nothing whatsoever to do with inciting these riots”¹²⁴—also “posed a very tough problem for the United States to know how to handle.”¹²⁵ Obviously, a four-power conference, to which, according to Secretary of State Dulles, the State Department was giving a great deal of thought, was one option. Anxious not to lend any semblance of moral approval of bloody Soviet suppression, Eisenhower sharply responded that “he thought he had made it crystal clear that if there were to be a four-power conference he himself would certainly not be present.” If anything, the uprising “certainly had provided us with the strongest possible argument to give to Mr. Churchill against a four-power meeting.” Uncertain of his policy options, Eisenhower finally asked the Psychological Strategy Board to devise a short-term plan on how to deal with the East German riots.¹²⁶

As a result of intensive deliberations within the administration, the Psychological Strategy Board drew up an “Interim U.S. Plan for Exploitation of Unrest in Satellite Europe” (PSB D-45), which was adopted by the National Security Council on 29 June as NSC directive 158.¹²⁷ As a key document on the U.S. reaction to the 17 June uprising, the document reveals that the strategy which the Eisenhower Administration consequently came to adopt sought to instrumentalize the East German crisis, by keeping the Soviets and the Ulbricht regime on the defensive in order to undercut their “peace and unity offensive” and to strengthen the position of those who favored West German rearmament and the EDC.

PSB D-45 viewed the East German uprising in the context of existing signs of unrest in Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, and Albania. While resentment over excessive production quotas, food shortages, and low living standards had triggered the revolts, these grievances were, in

¹²² HICOG Berlin to HICOG Bonn, 30 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-3053.

¹²³ Conant to Secretary of State, 26 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-2653.

¹²⁴ Memorandum of Discussion at the 150th Meeting of the National Security Council, 18 June 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 1587. This view is corroborated by a telegram from HICOG Berlin to the Secretary of State, 17 June 1953. Reporting on the day’s events the cable concluded that “to best our knowledge, no American involved.” NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1753. “American observers,” however, “mingled freely” among the rioters. See CIA “Comment on East Berlin Uprising,” 17 June 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Records, Box 3. Officers of HICOG Berlin’s Eastern Affairs Division “mingled with groups” of demonstrators and “talked to bystanders” during a brief visit (3-4:30 PM). No attempt was made by East German police to “keep persons obviously American away from discussion groups.” HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 16 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-1653. One of these observers was the sister of CIA chief Allen Dulles, Eleanor Dulles, who was officially visiting Berlin at the time. See Eleanor L. Dulles, *Berlin: The Wall is Not Forever* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 14-17.

¹²⁵ Memorandum of Discussion at the 150th Meeting of the National Security Council, 18 June 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 1587.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 1587-90.

¹²⁷ On the development of NSC 158, see Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 120-26.

the analysis of PSB D-45, “overshadowed by the clearly expressed political objectives of the German rebels.” More than anything, the uprising seemed to be “a kind of spontaneous direct-action plebiscite in which the East German masses voted with their fists for free elections, the reunification of Germany and the withdrawal of Soviet occupation forces.” The plan expected that attempts may be renewed, in different areas, to start local strikes, demonstrations, or other manifestations of continuing resistance, and with popular resentment of the Soviets “near the boiling point,” concluded that the uprising in the GDR created “the greatest opportunity for initiating effective policies to help roll back Soviet power that has yet come to light.”¹²⁸

The NSC decided on a dual strategy. First, the administration was to emphasize “at the earliest possible moment” strong U.S. support for German unification based on free elections, thus responding to the momentum created by the uprising toward Four-Power talks on Germany. This coincided with the views of U.S. diplomats in Germany who had pointed to the opportunity given by the rebellion to wrest the initiative on the unity issue from the Soviets and to exploit the undermined Soviet position in Germany for “an offensive at the highest level.”¹²⁹ By early July, Adenauer had publicly reversed his longstanding opposition to a high-level East-West conference, and on July 15, the three Western Allies, at a meeting in Washington, called for a four power foreign ministers’ meeting on Germany for the coming fall.¹³⁰

Second, the PSB D-45 strategy consisted of a variety of overt, covert, and psychological warfare measures designed “to nourish resistance to Communist oppression throughout satellite Europe, short of mass rebellion [...] and without compromising its spontaneous nature, [and] to undermine satellite puppet authority.”¹³¹ Among the proposed measures, some of which remain classified, were the announcement on 20 June 1953 of the President’s allocation of \$50 million for the reconstruction of West Berlin, the exploitation before the United Nations of Soviet repression of the East German revolt, and the call for a Red Cross investigation of the conditions in the GDR and the consequences of Soviet repression as well as efforts to increase the flow of defectors by overt and covert propaganda, the expansion of existing radio programs, and inter-Allied discussion to complete preparations on a Volunteer Freedom Corps, a kind of Cold War Foreign Legion composed of anti-communist East European emigres. NSC 158 also called for the consideration of “large-scale systematic balloon propaganda operations to the satellites.”¹³²

¹²⁸ Psychological Strategy Board (PSB), “Interim U.S. Psychological Strategy Plan for Exploitation of Unrest in Satellite Europe (PSB D-45),” 1 July 1953, NA, RG 273, NSC 158 Series.

¹²⁹ Hulick to Secretary of State, 25 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/9-2553 (FOIA to author); Conant to Dulles, 26 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-2653.

¹³⁰ Schwarz, *Adenauer*, 85; Hershberg, “Explosion in the Offing,” 529-30.

¹³¹ Summary of PSB D-45, 22 June 1953, DDEL, White House Office Files, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Records 1952-1961, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 4; PSB, “Interim U.S. Psychological Strategy Plan for Exploitation of Unrest in Satellite Europe (PSB D-45),” 1 July 1953, NA, RG 273, NSC 158 series; NSC Executive Secretariat, “United States Objectives and Actions to Exploit the Unrest in Satellite States - A Report to the National Security Council,” 29 June 1953, NA, RG 273, NSC 158 Series.

¹³² Summary of PSB D-45, 22 June 1953, DDEL, White House Office Files, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Records 1952-1961, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 4; Report on the

Other options aired within the administration at the time included encouraging Adenauer to announce the building of “a Bundestag” on the grounds of the destroyed Reichstag. After the September elections, “an all-out push” would be made for this “perpetual monument,” one of the features of which was to be a “Hall of Heroes” in which Willi Götting, a West Berlin painter who had been shot by the Soviets during the riots, “would be the first to appear.”¹³³ In addition, the PSB proposed a CIA-financed “National Committee to Memorialize the Martyrs of Freedom,” the immediate task of which would be “to memorialize the patriotic uprisings in East Berlin and East Germany.”¹³⁴ Götting, C.D. Jackson thought, “might also be the very handy martyr for the I[n]ternational C[onference] [of] F[ree] T[rade] U[nions] to latch on to.”¹³⁵ Moreover, it was proposed that a concerted effort be made to exploit the meeting of the Communist-sponsored World Federation of Teachers’ Unions scheduled to convene in Berlin in late July, pointing out that the uprising had not simply been “against physical [oppression], but also against subjugation of the mind and spirit.”¹³⁶ In addition, the director of the State Department’s Policy Planning Staff, Robert Bowie, proposed to “encourage mass, passive resistance which would indicate to one and all under Soviet rule that they are not alone and which would demonstrate to the outside world the vitality of their opposition.” According to Eisenhower aide Walt Rostow, Bowie suggested that this was to be done by celebrating a “day of mourning for the martyrs of East Berlin” or a “Go home, Ivan’ Day.”¹³⁷ Within HICOG Berlin, measures such as demanding the release of all political prisoners, the restoration of sector-sector streetcar service, freeing interzonal travel, and channeling Western literature and printed information into East Germany were considered useful to exert pressure on East Germany’s communist rulers “to the maximum of their capabilities.”¹³⁸

* * * * *

The major element in this psychological warfare strategy, however, proved to be a large-scale food program for East Germany, approved by the PSB on 1 July 1953. Taking advantage of consumer goods shortages in East Germany, the food program would ideally combine humanitarian

Implementation of PSB D-45, Strauss to Stevens, 23 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.03/9-2353 (FOIA to author); for NSC 158, see White House Office Files, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Records 1952-1961, Special Series, Presidential Subseries, Box 1; H. W. Brands, “The Eisenhower Administration and the Volunteer Freedom Corps,” *Military Affairs* 52:1 (1988), 7-11.

¹³³ Memo, Edward M. O’Connor to Abbott Washburn, 18 August 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 1.

¹³⁴ Edward M. O’Connor to C.D. Jackson, 1 July 1953, DDEL, White House Central Files (Confidential File), Subject Series, Box 61. The project, however, was not implemented.

¹³⁵ C.D. Jackson to Thomas Braden, 28 July 1953, DDEL, White House Central Files (Confidential File), Subject Series, Box 61.

¹³⁶ Memo “Points to be stressed at meeting in Mr. Jackson’s Office this Afternoon,” 6 July 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Records, Box 1; Memo, C.D. Jackson to Secretary of Health, Education and Welfare, 7 July 1953, DDEL, White House Central Files (Confidential File), Subject Series, Box 61.

¹³⁷ W.W. Rostow to C.D. Jackson, 22 June 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Records, Box 1.

¹³⁸ HICOG Berlin, Eastern Affairs Division, “Projects for Keeping the Soviets Off Balance in East Germany,” 21 August 1953, NRC, RG 466, Berlin Element, Box 3.

motives with political-psychological objectives, the latter being the governing strategic consideration. The distribution of food at no cost to the East Germans would help to alleviate the immediate crisis “but offer no long-range change in the deteriorating economic condition.”¹³⁹ While demonstrating continuing U.S. concern for the plight of the East Germans, the main objectives of the food program were to keep the Soviets on the defensive and to aggravate the antagonism between SED regime and populace, thus preventing the consolidation of the Ulbricht regime. Popular sentiment, it was hoped, would “crystallize on the food issue as [a] showdown point for [a] major test of strength.”¹⁴⁰ Indeed, the very day the food offer was publicly announced, the CIA reported that “the workers are planning another blow-up.”¹⁴¹

At the same time, the food relief was also expected to boost Adenauer’s re-election prospects. The expeditious exploitation of the present situation, Conant urged from Bonn, could “provide [a] powerful stimulus to the Adenauer election victory.”¹⁴² Given that “our primary objective should be to put Adenauer in [a] position to take decisive action with respect to [the] East Zone crisis,”¹⁴³ maximum credit for the program, the High Commissioner recommended, should therefore be given to the chancellor.¹⁴⁴

Various schemes for implementing the program were considered. Outlining the options, State Department officials recognized that “[i]f humanitarian considerations were to take precedence over the psychological advantages to be gained, and the amount of food to be offered were [was] to be reduced considerably,” thus without U.S. governmental intervention and by unobtrusive methods, some food could certainly get into East Germany.¹⁴⁵ But this ran precisely counter to the intention behind the program. Another proposal called for Chancellor Adenauer to issue a formal request to Eisenhower, who would respond by making food available from the Allied Berlin stockpile and from agricultural surpluses in the United States, supplemented by Army C-rations. The food would then be distributed through private channels, churches, and charitable organizations.¹⁴⁶ This option was soon discarded for the fear of endangering these inner-German links which were of vital importance to political prisoners and others supported by the churches in East Germany. The CIA, the Air Force, and the influential journalist Drew Pearson favored a riskier scheme by which the Air Re-supply and Communications Service, an arm of the U.S. Air Force, would send food to the East by way of balloons, a plan which ran into strong opposition

¹³⁹ Riddleberger to Smith, 6 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-653. On the one-hour long debate in the NSC on the food program, see the memoirs of the Director of the Mutual Security Agency, Harold Stassen (and Marshall Houts), *Eisenhower: Turning the World Towards Peace* (St. Paul, MN: Merrill/Magnus Publishing Corp., 1990), 175-77.

¹⁴⁰ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 6 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.00/8-653.

¹⁴¹ “Telephone Conversation with Allen W. Dulles,” DDEL, John Foster Dulles Papers, Telephone Call Series, Box 1.

¹⁴² Conant to Secretary of State, 26 June 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/6-2653.

¹⁴³ Conant to Secretary of State, 3 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-353.

¹⁴⁴ Riddleberger to Smith, 6 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-653; *New York Times*, 6 July 1953.

¹⁴⁵ Riddleberger to General Smith, 7 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-753.

¹⁴⁶ *FRUS 1952-1954*, VII, 1611-1614.

from High Commissioner Conant.¹⁴⁷ Indeed, one proposal envisaged U.S. and Western food convoys arriving at selected Iron Curtain border points in East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia demanding entrance on pre-announced days. If denied entry, “it might be very effective to arrive at the border points anyway on the day and at the time announced, and permit the news cameras and reporters [...] to cover the event of Soviet denial.”¹⁴⁸

“From a psychological point of view,” it was finally deemed most effective if the offer for food for East Germany was made by a direct approach to the Soviet Government.¹⁴⁹ Thus, on July 10, the program was officially announced by publication of an exchange of letters between Chancellor Adenauer and President Eisenhower. Simultaneously, Eisenhower’s note to the Soviets, offering \$15 million worth of food aid for the East Germans, was published.¹⁵⁰ Planned as a *fait accompli* regardless of Soviet reaction, rejection by the Soviets on July 11 came as little surprise.¹⁵¹ Headed by Eleanor Dulles and Richard Strauss, an interdepartmental committee then decided to support a plan which placed the food packages—the so-called “Eisenhower packages”—at the disposal of the federal West German government for distribution to the East Germans. Modeled after a local Berlin “neighborly aid program,”¹⁵² the food was made available to East Berliners and East Zoners at various distribution centers in the Western sectors of Berlin which were still accessible from the East, with distribution commencing on July 27.

The Eisenhower packages scheme received an “overwhelming response”¹⁵³ from the East Germans. By the end of the first day, HICOG reported that the number of applicants for food packages—103,743 packages were issued—had exceeded all expectations, a success attributed mainly to the heavy play given by RIAS to the operation.¹⁵⁴ By the third day, over 200,000 packages were being distributed daily. By the end of the first phase of the program (August 15), 865,000 people had come from East Germany and East Berlin to get food. Since many recipients were carrying others’ identity cards in order to obtain several packages (on an average each applicant collected about three packages), altogether 2,598,202 packages had been given out. By

¹⁴⁷ W.K. Scott to General Smith, 27 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2753; Frederick Ayer Jr., Special Assistant to the Secretary, Department of the Air Force, 29 July 1953, DDEL, C. D. Jackson Records, Box 2.

¹⁴⁸ Frederick Ayer Jr., Special Assistant to the Secretary, Department of the Air Force, 29 July 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Records, Box 2.

¹⁴⁹ Riddleberger to Smith, 6 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-653.

¹⁵⁰ *Department of State Bulletin* 29:734 (20 July 1953), 67-69. For Adenauer’s 4 July 1953 letter to Eisenhower and Eisenhower’s response of July 10, see *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 1615-16, 1617.

¹⁵¹ For the “*fait accompli*” element in the offer see Edward M. O’Connor to C.D. Jackson, 8 July 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 3, and Conant to Secretary of State, 11 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-1153; for the Russian reaction, see O’Shaughnessy to Secretary of State, 11 July 1953, DDEL, White House Central Files (Confidential File), 1953-61, Subject Series, Box 37; *Neues Deutschland*, 12 June 1953; *Department of State Bulletin* 29:734 (20 July 1953), 68; and Fritz Schenk, *Im Vorzimmer der Diktatur. 12 Jahre Pankow* [Inside the Reception Room of the Dictator. 12 Years in Pankow] (Köln: Kiepenheuer Witsch, 1962), 226-31.

¹⁵² While organized by Kreuzberg Mayor Kressmann, even this local initiative was perceived by the SED as “ist doch vom Ami gemacht” [done by the Americans]. SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

¹⁵³ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 28 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2853.

¹⁵⁴ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 27 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2753.

mid-August, 75 per cent of the population of East Berlin had received a package. Most importantly, however, two-thirds of the food went to people living in the Berlin periphery and to “deep zoners.”¹⁵⁵ A second program, lasting from August 28 to October 3, evoked a similar response. Added to the first phase of the project, more than 5.5 million food packages were distributed.¹⁵⁶

Documents in the SED archives reveal the extent to which the food program exacerbated tensions within the GDR in the aftermath of the uprising and prevented the SED regime from effectively consolidating its hold over the population. To be sure, even before the initiation of the food program the SED recognized that “all social strata within the population in all party districts displayed a hesitant and in part distrustful attitude towards the measures inaugurated by party and regime” and that many East Germans wanted to “finally see deeds follow words.”¹⁵⁷ By mid-July, internal SED reports were conceding—rather euphemistically—that “17 June is not yet clearly recognized as a fascist provocation among the workers and the populace.” The general opinion that dissatisfaction among the workers with party and government had been the cause of the revolt has not yet been overcome, an SED internal report on the situation in Berlin as of mid-July conceded.¹⁵⁸ As late as mid-September, party officials were forced to report that “a large part of the population, despite notable progress, continues to be hesitant and pessimistic,” and that even party members remained “reserved, suspicious and non-committal.”¹⁵⁹

Underestimating the effectiveness of the American program, the SED initially reacted to the food distribution merely by intensifying propaganda. Noting the “relatively large number of inhabitants from all social strata” (reports emphasized the high proportion of women) and the large influx of people from outside the capital area going to Berlin to receive their packages, the SED ordered a massive propaganda drive (Agitationseinsätze) at rail stations and other strategic points. In Potsdam alone, 150,000 leaflets denouncing the food program were printed. Loudspeaker systems were installed in key spots, and the National Front orchestrated an intensified action of party agitators and party meetings. Newspapers and radio broadcasts denounced the “Bettelpakete” and named those who were caught receiving packages.¹⁶⁰ Contrary to the grand-

¹⁵⁵ Edward M. O’Connor to C.D. Jackson, DDEL, White House Central Files (Confidential File), Subject Series, Box 37; HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 17 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-1753.

¹⁵⁶ More detailed statistics can be found in Conant to Secretary of State, 17 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-1753.

¹⁵⁷ Zusammenfassung der Stimmung, Vorschläge und Kritik der Werktätigen zur Erklärung des ZK vom 22.6.53 [Summary of the Workers’ Opinions, Suggestions and Criticism on the CC Declaration of 22 June 1953], 23 June 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/435.

¹⁵⁸ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Die Lage in Berlin” [The Situation in Berlin], 18 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch IV 2/5/561. Indeed, there are indications that the month of July witnessed a second wave of demonstrations and riots. See Armin Mitter, in 42. *Sitzung der Enquete-Kommission “Aufarbeitung von Geschichte und Folgen der SED-Diktatur in Deutschland”*, 30, 78.

¹⁵⁹ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Sektor Parteiinformation [Section Party Information], Informationsbericht [Informational Report], 19 September 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁶⁰ SED/Abteilung Agitation [Department of Agitation] to Grotewohl, 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

scale propaganda drive, few punitive actions other than occasional package confiscations were thought necessary.

By the end of the month, reports reaching the SED headquarters in Berlin sounded alarming. True, some East Germans believed the food relief to be “only propaganda for Adenauer,”¹⁶¹ but many responded enthusiastically. Party officials sent to West Berlin noted the rapidly increasing number of people on their way to receive packages.¹⁶² By July 31, train ticket sales had multiplied, in some cases by seven. Two-thirds of the passengers in trains from Berlin, the SED was informed, were carrying food packages.¹⁶³ Party observers were obviously impressed by the patience the food recipients showed in waiting, often for hours, to receive their packages. “It is remarkable,” one report from Berlin noted, “that entire families and house communities were heading for the distribution points.”¹⁶⁴ Others similarly noted the “*starker Andrang*,” or large throngs, at the distribution points.¹⁶⁵ Pointing out that trains to Berlin had been occupied at 180-200 percent of normal ridership, the massive number of arriving and departing package recipients at one railway station, according to one official observer, “gave the impression of a demonstration.”¹⁶⁶ A report from the Cottbus party district noted “vigorous discussions” of the U.S. food program in factories and in the entire district. Many workers, according to these reports, went so far as to demand that food packages should be claimed for the entire factory by factory representatives.¹⁶⁷ On July 31, 150 employees of a industrial plant in Wittenberg were reported to have organized a joint trip to West Berlin. But not only workers deserted the party line again. Among the food recipients, the SED central committee learned, were growing numbers of train personnel in uniform (taking advantage of their free train tickets), and mail and administrative personnel.

Most disconcerting to the SED, numerous *Genossinnen* and *Genossen* (party members) also made the trip to Berlin. Five hundred and seventy party members, sent to West Berlin to agitate

¹⁶¹ Kreisleitung der SED Rathenow [Local Party Headquarters in Rathenow] to Bezirksleitung der SED [SED District Leadership], 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch IV 2/5/561.

¹⁶² Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “1. Bericht über die Lage in Berlin - Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren” [First Report on the Situation in Berlin - The Distribution of Food Packages in the Western Sectors], 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

¹⁶³ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “IV. Bericht über die Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren” [Fourth Report on the Distribution of Food Packages in the Western Sectors], 31 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

¹⁶⁴ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “1. Bericht über die Lage in Berlin - Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

¹⁶⁵ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei, “1. Bericht über die Lage in Berlin - Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561; “2. Bericht über die Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren” [Second Report on the Distribution of Food Packages in the Western Sectors], 29 July 1953, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “5. Bericht über die Ausgabe der USA-Lebensmittelpakete in Westberlin” [Fifth Report on the Distribution of Food Packages in the Western Sectors], 2 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/564.

¹⁶⁷ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei, “1. Bericht über die Lage in Berlin Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561; “2. Bericht über die Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 29 July 1953, *ibid.*

against the food distribution, returned with only 150 packages, a remarkably small number which was attributed to the fact that most of them had kept their packages for themselves.¹⁶⁸ In a party meeting in Fürstenwalde, Berlin was informed, only eight of 48 SED members were consistently resisting the temptation.¹⁶⁹ The fact that “even members and functionaries of the [SED] party were succumbing to the provocation and hence were becoming party enemies” was exemplified by the events in the town of Werder, where the local party secretary and his deputy as well as the chairman of the farmers’ association and local production cooperative, and following them a member of the mayor’s household, went to Berlin to receive their packages. “Following this bad example all other residents one by one went to get the *Amipakete*.”¹⁷⁰

Furthermore, many people were carrying several identity cards which were required for the pick-up in order to make the trip worthwhile. In one incident, a farm employee was found to be carrying 15 food packages.¹⁷¹ Indeed, even the number of people registering their children for ID cards jumped up. The police in the small town of Fürstenwalde reported to Berlin that on one of the first days of the food program alone, 80 people had requested registration, a startling number considering that, despite encouragement on the part of the authorities, not a single registration had been requested since 1949!¹⁷²

By August 1, the food program had reached dramatic proportions. It was clear that East Berlin had—as during the initial phase of the uprising—underestimated the response it would provoke among the East Germans. In its meeting that day, the SED politburo decided on a “shame” campaign against the food package program. To counter the “provocative acts of the American and British warmongers,” the politburo suspended the sale of train tickets to Berlin and declared illegal the carrying of more than one’s own personal ID. Security measures were taken at railway stations in order to prevent “enemy provocations,” and all freight and bus traffic to West Berlin was halted. Party, unions, and other mass organizations were mobilized to carry out political mass agitation against the “imperialist” aid program. “It is necessary,” the politburo informed the local party organizations, “to take measures to ensure, in accordance with the local conditions, the vigorous carrying out of the New Course. In doing so, the fight against the agents of the American and West German war-mongers should be the focus of our fight for the powers of workers and peasants in the German Democratic Republic.”¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei, “1. Bericht über die Lage in Berlin - Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

¹⁶⁹ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei, “IV. Bericht über die Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 31 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

¹⁷⁰ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und der Massenorganisationen, Informationsbericht, 12 September 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei, “2. Bericht über die Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

¹⁷³ Minutes of the Politburo Meeting, 1 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2/311; R. Chwalek, Railways Ministry, to Grotewohl, 2 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437. There are indications that the announcement of the food

In addition to propagandistic threats against those easterners who “succumbed” to the “Ami bait,” food package recipients were registered (though at no point consistently), their names publicized, and, in increasing numbers, their personal IDs and food packages confiscated. The GDR State Security Service mailed out forged invitations to unemployed West Berliners to receive packages under the program. Several thousand agitators were sent to West Berlin to incite unrest among those waiting in line for their food packages under often miserable circumstances.¹⁷⁴ In order to divert attention from the U.S.-sponsored program, the GDR regime, by August 4, put in place its own food distribution program, aimed at West Berlin unemployed and retirees. While heavily publicized in the GDR press, this effort never reached the dimensions of its counterpart.¹⁷⁵ Another “stunt” attempted by the eastern authorities was an offer to purchase food from the funds (more than \$1.6 million) of the GDR Central Bank (*Deutsche Notenbank*) blocked since 1952 in the United States. When, however, the Eisenhower Administration indicated that it would be willing to sell such food to the East German regime, the proposal was “dropped like a hot potato.”¹⁷⁶

While the crack-down considerably reduced their number, East Germans were still reaching the distribution centers in West Berlin by the thousands. The food program remained the focus of popular attention, preventing the SED from internal stabilization and keeping it on (in the words of one U.S. official) “a peevish defensive.”¹⁷⁷ Internal SED reports still indicated that “the enemy was increasingly succeeding in winning over large portions of the population, in particular retirees and housewives, but also workers.”¹⁷⁸ Leipzig reported “intense discussions over the food program in the plants.”¹⁷⁹ While the politburo-ordered ticket sale suspension was taking effect, the transportation ministry reported, “many [of its] employees were still carrying out their jobs without offensively exposing to the passengers the true character of the ‘American aid.’”¹⁸⁰ Others noted

program on July 18 was followed by increased Soviet tank movement around and in Berlin. Prowe, *Weltstadt in Krisen*, 123.

¹⁷⁴ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Informationsnotiz 302” [Informational Note No. 302], 4 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/564. See HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 4 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-453.

¹⁷⁵ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Informationsnotiz 301” [Informational Note No. 301], 4 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/564; HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 10 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-1053. On the GDR countermeasures, see also Stassen and Houts, *Eisenhower*, 182-88.

¹⁷⁶ Memo, Richard Strauss to Stevens, 23 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.03/9-2353 (FOIA to author); “Kurzer Bericht über die Blockierung der Konten der Deutschen Notenbank in US-\$ bei us-amerikanischen Banken” [Short Report on the Blocking of Deutsche Notenbank dollar accounts with US Banks], 25 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/490.

¹⁷⁷ Coburn Kidd to Geoffrey W. Lewis, 29 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2953.

¹⁷⁸ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Zusammenfassung [Summary], 1 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁷⁹ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Zusammenfassung, 1 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁸⁰ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen [Railways Ministry], Politische Verwaltung [Political Administration], “Situationsbericht” [Situation Report], 2 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

that the attitude of the railway officials “still varied a lot.”¹⁸¹ Indeed, in some cases the Railways Ministry orders had been relayed only with considerable delay, enabling many East Germans still to acquire tickets.¹⁸²

The restrictive measures, as foreseen by the Americans, heightened tensions in the already explosive situation. Party officials had all along recorded that some of those traveling to Berlin argued “very aggressively”: “Those in West Berlin are behind us. If we get in trouble, we just have to say so, then the matter will go before the UN.”¹⁸³ From all over East Germany, SED officials reported “heated discussion of the measures taken by the Railway Ministry.”¹⁸⁴ In discussions of the stoppage of all ticket sales to Berlin, some commented, “This must be the freedom of the East Zone.”¹⁸⁵ Noting the “negative discussion” among those who were now precluded from going to Berlin—“This way the government cannot win the confidence of the people!”—reports stated that “[o]ne can detect a general annoyance [with the measures].”¹⁸⁶

In some instances, disappointed East Germans resorted to what was labeled “provocative” action, coercing the authorities to allow train rides to Berlin or simply going by car. In Groß-Schönebeck (Berlin), about 150 women forced the departure of a train by initially blocking the tracks.¹⁸⁷ In Angermünde, 2,000 people awaiting returnees from West Berlin assumed what local SED officials perceived to be a “threatening attitude against the VP [People’s Police].” When the VP called in the fire guards to turn hoses on the people, riots broke out, and it was three hours before order was restored.¹⁸⁸ Others tried to circumvent the regime’s measures by buying train tickets for destinations close to Berlin, completing the travel by other means.¹⁸⁹ In other parts of the country, workers went on strike to protest the regime’s measures. Repeatedly, threats of an imminent general strike and a “second 17 June” were reported to Berlin.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸¹ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, “Situationsbericht”, 3 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/542.

¹⁸² Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, “Situationsbericht,” 2 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/542; Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, Situationsbericht, 3 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/542.

¹⁸³ SED/Abteilung Agitation to Grotewohl, 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

¹⁸⁴ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, “Situationsbericht,” 2 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/542.

¹⁸⁵ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, “Situationsbericht,” 3 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/542.

¹⁸⁶ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, “Situationsbericht,” 2 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

¹⁸⁷ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, “Situationsbericht,” 2 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

¹⁸⁸ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Politische Verwaltung, “Situationsbericht,” 3 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/542.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung der Berichte der Bezirksleitungen vom 5. 8. 53” [Summary of Reports of the District Headquarters], 6 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563. See also HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 6 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.00/8-653, detailing unrest, incidents, and minor disturbances. U.S. intelligence agencies described worker and populace sentiment as “tense with mood unaltered.” *Ibid.*

RIAS continued to play an important role in the implementation of U.S. policy. Its broadcasts, to the agony of the SED, served as effective means for propagandizing the food distribution deep into the Soviet zone.¹⁹¹ More importantly, many East Germans now openly listened to the American-sponsored radio program to show their defiance of the regime. Thus, in the small town of Germershausen, “the entire population was listening to RIAS or the NWDR,” apparently turning their radios to such volume “that it could be heard in the streets.”¹⁹²

In order to overcome the shake-up caused by the June events and stabilize party control within the party and the population, the Fifteenth SED Central Committee Plenum (24-26 July 1953) reinforced its decision on the New Course, thus pursuing a dual program of economic concessions and political coercion. At the end of August, a highly publicized top-level GDR government delegation to Moscow received promises of aid and an end to reparations in an obvious effort to boost the SED regime’s standing. The food program effectively undermined these efforts. “The main issue in the discussions today,” an internal party report of August 3 stated, “was again the food package program. On the other hand, any discussion of the proposals of our People’s Chamber and the decision of the Fifteenth Plenum fell into the background.” The party organizations were “still not able to influence the discussion in any decisive manner.”¹⁹³ During the next days reports reached Berlin that “the population is hardly discussing the [...] decisions of the Fifteenth Plenum.” The reason for this, it was pointed out, was that the party’s propaganda drive was “almost exclusively concerned with the package program [...]”¹⁹⁴

Faced with train passengers outraged by the suspension of almost all traffic to Berlin, party officials were “still reacting defensively.”¹⁹⁵ The “fight for the enlightenment of the masses on the background of the food aid” was still not taken on effectively by the local party leadership.¹⁹⁶ In one representative instance, a SED-sponsored effort to bring about a factory-wide “vote of condemnation” of the “Western package provocation” resulted in 60 out of 74 workers abstaining

¹⁹¹ Ministerium für Eisenbahnwesen, Anlage zur Zusammenfassung der Berichte vom 8.8.53 von den Bezirksleitungen, 7 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁹² Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Informationsbericht Nr. 2” [Informational Report No. 2], 9 September 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁹³ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung,” 3 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁹⁴ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung der Bericht der Bezirksleitungen vom 4. 8. 53 über die Auswertung des 15. Plenums und die Stimmung der Bevölkerung” [Summary of the Reports of the District Headquarters of 4 August 53 on the Appraisal of the 15th Plenum and Public Opinion], 4 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁹⁵ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung,” 3 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁹⁶ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “1. Bericht über die Lage in Berlin - Ausgabe von Lebensmittelpaketen in den Westsektoren,” 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/561.

from the vote.¹⁹⁷ As an internal SED public opinion survey stated ominously, the relationship of party and government to the population “has worsened recently.”¹⁹⁸

Despite substantial economic Soviet support for their beleaguered client regime, many East Germans questioned the “point of those food deliveries from the Soviet Union. Prices are too high—and you can’t buy the merchandise. We would rather go to West Berlin to get our packages.”¹⁹⁹ The “bad Americans distribute free packages and the good friend makes us pay for them,” East Germans mocked at the news of Russian credits and aid.²⁰⁰ Noting that the great majority of the population had still not recognized the “political and provocative background” of the package program, most people showed themselves “continually uninterested” in the Soviet aid program.²⁰¹ When at one Berlin SED party meeting it was suggested that the Soviets’ suspension of the reparations was in accordance with German interests whereas Adenauer was said to desire a 50-year occupation of Germany, “the largest part of the participants broke into laughter.”²⁰² As late as mid-September, party officials acknowledged the “lasting influence of the enemy,” the *Versöhnlichkeit* (conciliatory attitude) of local authorities towards food recipients, and the intensifying “discussions and demands at railway stations to reopen the ticket sales.”²⁰³

* * * * *

The aid action was hailed in Washington, Bonn, and West Berlin as a “highly successful operation as part of [an] overall psychological strategy.”²⁰⁴ Berlin’s Mayor Reuter emphasized how worried the food program had made the Eastern authorities: It had been “like an artillery attack.”²⁰⁵ On the whole, HICOG Berlin concluded, the program had “again intensified [the]

¹⁹⁷ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung der Berichte der Bezirksleitungen vom 5. 8. 53,” 6 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁹⁸ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung der Bericht der Bezirksleitungen vom 4. 8. 53 über die Auswertung des 15. Plenums und die Stimmung der Bevölkerung,” 4 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

¹⁹⁹ SED/Abteilung Agitation to Grotewohl, 29 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437.

²⁰⁰ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung,” 3 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

²⁰¹ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Zusammenfassung der Berichte der Bezirksleitungen vom 7.8. 53,” 8 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563; for an especially illuminating assessment of anti-Soviet feelings among the East German population see Dralle, “Das DSF-Archiv,” 842-44.

²⁰² Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Stimmung und Argumente zum sowjetisch-deutschen Kommuniqué über die Verhandlungen in Moskau” [Opinions and Arguments on the Soviet-German Communiqué], 28 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

²⁰³ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Informationsbericht”, 12 September 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563. See also Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, Informationsbericht zur Stimmung der Bevölkerung über das Sowjetisch-Deutschen Kommuniqué, die Paket-Provokation und die Leipziger Messe” [Informational Report on Popular Opinion on the Soviet-German Communiqué, the Package Provocation and the Leipzig Fair], 5 September 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

²⁰⁴ Conant to Secretary of State, 31 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-3153.

²⁰⁵ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 4 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-453.

antagonism between the east German population and [the] SED regime.”²⁰⁶ Indeed, as Reuter put it, the program’s effect seemed to be nothing less than “a continuation of 17 June by other means.”²⁰⁷ It had provided a substantial amount of food to the undernourished East Berliners and East Germans and highlighted the food shortages in the GDR, thus forcing the Soviets and SED to increase the food rations of the population and further redirect industrial policy. More importantly, the operation had given the East German population an opportunity to demonstrate their defiance of the Communist regime—to “vote with their feet”—and once again proved the limits of the SED control apparatus. It had demonstrated in a very concrete way that the West was still very much interested in their lot and strengthened Washington’s standing behind the Iron Curtain. As one U.S. official judged, the aid had “given East Germans contact with the West and has made it once more a vital force in their lives. They know that the West exists, thinks about them and hopes some day that the east will be free.” In doing so, it had squarely placed the Soviets and the SED on the defensive, undercut their unity propaganda and considerably contributed to Adenauer’s overwhelming electoral success at the polls on 6 September 1953. “This important project has already bettered our position in the cold war,” the official enthusiastically informed Washington.²⁰⁸

To the “cold warriors” within the Eisenhower Administration, the program proved that there were innumerable means short of war that could be done to advance the liberation of Eastern Europe. Eisenhower ordered the PSB on July 11, “while matters [were] still hot,” to develop food programs for all other satellites “similar to the current one for East Germany.”²⁰⁹ Moreover, on September 2 the PSB approved a plan for the conversion of the Berlin food program into a long-range aid program which, to be psychologically exploitable, would “take the form of a German-sponsored, United States-supported organization” located in West Berlin.²¹⁰

Inspired by the success of the food program and convinced that a slackening of Western aid to the East Germans “would result in disillusionment and [the] feeling in [the] East Zone that west even after June 17 manifestation [the United States] fails to appreciate [the] spirit of resistance and [is] uninterested [in] their needs and fate,”²¹¹ U.S. officials pondered various other schemes, such as deliveries of medical supplies and other commodities in great popular demand, a clothing drive for the East, hospitality programs and the distribution of printed materials. Another effort to put the Soviets and the Ulbricht regime into a “tight squeeze” diplomatically was the Western High

²⁰⁶ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 29 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-2953.

²⁰⁷ Prowe, *Weltstadt in Krisenzeiten*, 122.

²⁰⁸ Michael S. Harris to Harold Stassen, 2 August 1953, DDEL, C.D. Jackson Records, Box 1; also in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 1633-36. Mutual Security Director Stassen later maintained that “[t]here is no doubt in my mind that the window of freedom those millions of East Germans glimpsed during this period, and their brutalization by the Soviet oppressors, laid the foundations for the political events of 1989.” Stassen and Houts, *Eisenhower*, 189.

²⁰⁹ Quoted in Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 162.

²¹⁰ Reinstein to General Smith, 25 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/8-2553; State to HICOG Bonn, 5 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-2053; Report on the Implementation of PSB D-45, Strauss to Stevens, 23 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.03/9-2353 (FOIA to author).

²¹¹ Department of State to HICOG Bonn, 2 October 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/10-253.

Commissioners' August proposal to restore free movement between the Western and Soviet Zones by abolishing the Allied interzonal passes, a measure which was intended to achieve "a sort of democratic infection"²¹² of the East German population.²¹³

The success of the food program came, however, at the cost of Western Allied disunity. Instead of a new cold war offensive, the British government had favored "get[ting] things back to normal as fast as possible"²¹⁴ in the uprising's aftermath by "letting the Russians save face in East Germany."²¹⁵ The food program obviously ran counter to this idea by maintaining the crisis atmosphere in Berlin as well as embarrassing Moscow's clients. In addition, British officials worried that the program would endanger West Berlin's security. Faced with a unilateral American *fait accompli*, the British High Commissioner expressed grave concern that the "present plan might result in [the] city being cut and even Berlin communications with [the] West being cut off" and argued that the project had been "untidily and hastily handled."²¹⁶ For his part, the French Commandant sarcastically asked whether, if the food aid resulted "in cutting [off] the city, . . . this be serving [the] best interests of [the] West Berliners."²¹⁷ Both the British and the French remained "nervous about the matter," U.S. officials reported.²¹⁸ As Conant informed Eisenhower later, British High Commissioner Ivone A. Kirkpatrick "at the last moment [...] nearly prevented the initiation of the program because he felt the risks were far too great."²¹⁹

In the face of Communist demonstrations staged at the food centers in August, British officials again argued that "security considerations call for [the] termination of [the] distribution operation."²²⁰ Like the French, they favored an early end to the operation and strongly opposed the establishment of a permanent organization which they considered "too blatant a type of political warfare against the East Zone regime and the Soviet occupation authorities."²²¹ British opposition

²¹² Memorandum of Conversation between E. Williams (State Department) and M. Ruffin (French Embassy), 5 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.00/8-553. Within the administration and among the Western allies there were, however, concerns that the measure would allow a massive infiltration of propagandists from the East before the upcoming federal elections. Thus, Conant reported on September 4 that some 8,000 to 10,000 FDJ and SED functionaries were expected to infiltrate into West Germany before the September 6 elections. Conant to Secretary of State, 4 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.00/9-453.

²¹³ The allies finally abandoned their requirement for interzonal travel passes on 14 November 1953, forcing the Soviets to do likewise on 25 November. See HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 23 November 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/11-2353.

²¹⁴ FO Minute, Roberts to Strang, 6 July 1953, PRO, FO/371/103843, CS 1016/161.

²¹⁵ Kirkpatrick to FO, 6 July 1953, PRO, FO/371/103843, CS 1016/158.

²¹⁶ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 24 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2453.

²¹⁷ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 23 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2353.

²¹⁸ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 16 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-1653; HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 22 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2253.

²¹⁹ Conant to Eisenhower, 19 October 1953, DDEL, DDEP, Administrative Series, Box 10.

²²⁰ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 4 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-453; Conant to Secretary of State, 11 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-1153.

²²¹ Memo by W. Dowling, 22 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862b.49/9-2253; HICOG Berlin to SecState, 4 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-453; Steere to Secretary of State, 24 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/9-2453 (FOIA to author).

to what had become a unilateral U.S. policy left the British, as a Foreign Office official termed it, “in quite bad odour with the Americans on cold war matters.”²²²

Significantly, this “sharp disagreement with the British”²²³ was recognized on the Soviet and East German side and thus diminished the impact of the food program. As early as July 7, the GDR Foreign Ministry supplied Grotewohl with a report concerning the “Dissension within the Camp of the Western Powers over the Question of Four-Power Talks” which emphasized the efforts of British and French “imperialists” to withstand U.S. pressure for a more aggressive policy, to retain a “last bit of political independence and not to close the door on four-power negotiations.”²²⁴ Similarly, a July 20 note to the Western High Commissioners by Semyonov revealed that Soviets were “also aware of [a] certain lack of unanimity re handling of the project,” hoping, as American observers noted, “to drive a wedge between the allies through release of [a] note at this time.”²²⁵

Even in West Germany, where the food program had initially won widespread public support, there were more frequent signs of apprehension.²²⁶ The U.S. note of July 10 to the Soviets had already caused some “adverse reaction” in some quarters of the press along the line: “food yes, propaganda no.”²²⁷ Arguing against increased “propaganda drum beating,” Conant warned on July 18 that “East and West Germans would react against obvious propaganda to which they are hyper-sensitive.”²²⁸ FRG officials grew more and more concerned about the pressures on food recipients and the GDR’s interference with the normal travel of Soviet-zoners to Berlin. West German charitable organizations, which had displayed a “highly negative” attitude all along regarding to involvement in the U.S. program, feared that the American action was jeopardizing their regular aid efforts. If, as a result of the food program, the Soviets should cut off the present flow of private parcels from West to East, this might have “serious repercussions for Adenauer,” the U.S. High Commissioner cautioned from Bonn.²²⁹ In addition, Mayor Reuter, among the aid program’s most enthusiastic supporters, worried about the negative impression made by denying food to West Berlin unemployed and poor. Press reports with headlines such as “Don’t Gamble with Hunger” reflected the increasingly critical comments in West Germany.²³⁰

²²² Jebb to FO, 9 September 1953, PRO, FO 371/103846, CS1016/237.

²²³ Conant to Eisenhower, 19 October 1953, DDEL, DDEP, Administrative Series, Box 10.

²²⁴ “Nach den faschistischen Provokationen in Berlin und in der DDR: Auseinandersetzungen im Lager der Westmächte über Viermächteverhandlungen” [After the Fascist Provocations in Berlin and the GDR. Frictions in the Camp of the Western Powers on Four Power Negotiations], 6 July 1953, enclosed in Busse/MfAA [Ministry for Foreign Affairs] to Eisermann/Regierungskanzlei [Chancellory], 8 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/463.

²²⁵ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 22 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2253.

²²⁶ Adenauer had early on complained about the negative reaction of the West German press. Günter Buchstab, ed., *Adenauer: “Es mußte alles neu gemacht werden.” Die Protokolle des CDU-Bundesvorstandes 1950-1953* [Adenauer: “We Had to Start from Scratch.” The Minutes of the CDU-Bundesvorstand] (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1986), 585.

²²⁷ Conant to Secretary of State, 18 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-1853.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*; *FRUS 1952-1954*, VII, 1632-33.

²²⁹ Conant to Secretary of State, 17 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-1753 (FOIA to author).

²³⁰ Steere to Secretary of State, 24 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/9-2453 (FOIA to author).

By the end of September, the Federal Government, which had only belatedly been consulted in the implementation of the program, was urging for a “visible stop” of the food distribution.²³¹ Confronted with U.S. efforts to continue aid to the Soviet Zone in one way or another later that year, Franz Thedieck, state secretary in the Ministry for All-German Affairs, warned Washington of the adverse impact of such programs on the eve of the Berlin Four-Power foreign ministers’ conference scheduled for early 1954. Due to mounting counter-arguments, Conant decided to “watch for [an] opening after [the] Four-Power conference.”²³²

At the same time as the United States conducted the food program, moreover, psychological warfare as codified in PSB D-45 came under heavy criticism from within the Eisenhower Administration, in particular from American diplomats in Europe. Reflecting a long-standing mistrust by the State Department towards the role and influence of the Psychological Strategy Board, the diplomats, meeting in Luxembourg in September 1953, pointed out that “we should never consider that Eastern Europe can be liberated by political warfare devices no matter how well planned and energetic they may be.”²³³ Psychological warfare, they declared, “should never be allowed to run ahead of carefully considered political objectives as there is always the danger if this is allowed to happen that psychological warfare can start to make policy rather than serve it.” One basic long term objective of American policy was the “withdrawal of the Soviet Army from the eastern zone of Germany and from the Eastern European satellites. ... [However, s]tirring up resistance or incitements of revolts—‘keep[ing] the pot virtually at a boiling point’—might have the long-range effect of retarding a Soviet military withdrawal.”²³⁴

Rather than proposing intensified psychological warfare, U.S. diplomats argued for what was described in one document as an “honorable and defensible compromise with the Soviets, with the aim of achieving the gradual liberation of the oppressed people through an evolutionary rather than revolutionary process.”²³⁵ From HICOG Berlin came the warning that “aggressive US follow-up actions on food could conceivably produce another June 17.” If the food action and repressive SED measures were to lead to uprisings on the same scale, Berlin officials believed that “[the] Soviets with KVP in forefront will put down such uprisings ruthlessly. End result could be severe blow to workers’ morale, since there was little likelihood [that] such repression this time would be

²³¹ Steere to Secretary of State, 24 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/9-2453 (FOIA to author). The State Department had specifically recommended against “detailed consultation” with the Federal Government in the initial stages of the program. See Riddleberger to General Smith, 6 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-653. As late as July 24, Secretary of State Walter Hallstein “indicated that the chancellor had not been consulted.” HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 24 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/7-2453.

²³² Conant to Bonn, 9 December 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/12-953; Department of State to HICOG Bonn, 9 December 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/12-953.

²³³ Memorandum Prepared in the Department of State, 1 October 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VIII, 85.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ Working Paper Prepared in the Eastern Affairs Division, Berlin Element, HICOG, 25 June 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 1598.

accompanied by economic concessions.”²³⁶ High Commissioner Conant warned that “we don’t want to do anything that will cause any more bloodshed.”²³⁷ The objective of American policy with regard to the Soviet zone, he wrote to Secretary of State Dulles, at least insofar as he understood it, was “to keep the pot simmering but not to bring it to a boil.”²³⁸

Keeping the pot simmering, however, could not be achieved by psychological warfare alone: “Without under-emphasizing the significance of [the] food program [or] similar efforts,” HICOG Berlin warned, “a basic requirement for maintaining [the] current degree [of] anti-regime attitude and for weakening GDR and Soviet position would appear to be clear cut US and/or allied political pressure on Soviets, exerted on high level and in simple terms, in order that East Germans can continue to believe there is real purpose in maintaining pressure on GDR Government and SED.”²³⁹ Emphasizing the need for a more “positive policy,” U.S. officials in Berlin thought that negotiations on an all-German Commission as proposed by the Soviets “would be a greater blow to their equilibrium than if we succeed in getting the entire Soviet Zone population into West Berlin for a turkey dinner.”²⁴⁰

Later that fall, the administration’s secret “Operation Solarium” policy reassessment, while endorsing intensified reliance on covert action, concluded that rollback in Eastern Europe was not immediately feasible.²⁴¹ At the end of September 1953, the State Department outlined the U.S. position on unrest in the Soviet Zone. Reminding missions abroad that “it is possible to maintain a psychological climate of resistance” but that attempts to “reduce Soviet power in the GDR should always be examined for their impact on our efforts to integrate the Federal Republic with the West,” the State Department warned that “we do not want to risk precipitating prematurely a mass,

²³⁶ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 6 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/8-653.

²³⁷ Record of 6th CINCSAEUR-HICOG Commanders Conference, 29 June 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 1605. On Conant’s role see James G. Hershberg, *James B. Conant: Harvard to Hiroshima and the Making of the Nuclear Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 660-63.

²³⁸ Conant to Dulles, 8 August 1953, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, VII, 1640.

²³⁹ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 17 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B/8-1753.

²⁴⁰ Memo, Sutterlin to Creel, 20 August 1953, NRC, RG 466, HICOG papers. There was also a growing criticism of U.S. support for anti-Communist, CIA-controlled organizations in West Berlin: “It is felt that the number of these organizations, type of activities they engage in and type of individual some of them may attract as co-workers, has created situation fraught with both opportunity and risk. While we do not wish to exaggerate possibility of serious trouble here, very setting of West Berlin makes it vulnerable to mass action; and organizations mentioned have certain possibilities, difficult to calculate, of stirring up such action. It is felt that most careful consideration should be given to just what ends the activities in question are designed to achieve, and what methods should be prescribed to reach these ends. [...] I feel that recent developments in East Germany call for some degree of reappraisal.” HICOG Berlin to HICOG Bonn, 15 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762A.0221/8-1553 (FOIA to author).

²⁴¹ John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment. A Critical Appraisal of Postwar American National Security Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 145ff.; Martin Beglinger, “Containment” im Wandel. *Die amerikanische Außen- und Sicherheitspolitik im Übergang von Truman zu Eisenhower* [Containment in Transition. The US Foreign and Security Policy during the Transition from Truman to Eisenhower] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1988), 144-64; H.W. Brands, “The Age of Vulnerability: Eisenhower and the National Insecurity State,” *American Historical Review* 94 (October 1989), 963-69; Marc Trachtenberg, *History and Strategy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 132-41; Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 166-79; Hershberg, “Explosion in the Offing,” 527; Felken, *Dulles und Deutschland*, 110-17.

open rebellion” or “incur the blame for its consequences.” Specifically the Department warned that U.S. officials should not advise East Germans “to engage in strikes and mass demonstrations,” and that continued propaganda “should not be used to encourage a repetition of the events of June 17, 1953.”²⁴² Even rollback zealot C.D. Jackson eventually had to admit that the United States did not have the power to eject the Soviets from East Germany through coercion: “I am all for complete, total, and crushing defeat if we really have the leverage to bring it about,” he wrote Dulles: “But we haven’t, and they [the Soviets] know it, therefore all they have to do is to lay their ears back, and no real progress will have been made except raising hatred of Russia a notch or two in German minds.”²⁴³

This realization stemmed to a large degree from the experience of the uprising and the food program. Indeed, because U.S. policy throughout the program remained limited in its objectives and did not intend to provoke a second “Day X,” it could not prevent—and might ironically have ultimately helped—the consolidation of the Ulbricht regime. The initial announcement of the program, on July 10, had taken place at the very height of the struggle within the SED leadership, when Ulbricht’s position was being challenged by politburo member Rudolf Herrnstadt, State Security chief Wilhelm Zaisser, and others. Only after Grotewohl returned from a brief visit to Moscow (July 8-9 1953) was Ulbricht able to overcome the rebellion within the leadership, as manifested in the accusations against both Herrnstadt and Zaisser before the Central Committee in mid-July.²⁴⁴ The U.S. food initiative might well have added to the Soviets’ belief that Ulbricht’s demotion would be a sign of weakness inviting further Western actions. Because of the timing, Ulbricht’s overthrow could have been interpreted as a reaction to pressure from the West. Certainly the announcement of what Molotov called a “propaganda maneuver” provided Ulbricht with a powerful argument to assure his survival.²⁴⁵

The development of the food program itself reflected its diminishing returns as an anti-regime measure. American observers noted that the stream of food recipients was slackening off during September, as East Zone residents reported widespread confiscation of food parcels and “increased Communist harassment.”²⁴⁶ The East Zoners’ early inclination to “thumb their noses” at their communist rulers was thus decreasing; plebiscite-type demonstrations could not be maintained at a steady pitch over a protracted period of time. Diminishing in scope and becoming a minor sideshow in the Cold War, U.S. officials knew the food program “would lose its news value, its

²⁴² Department of State Circular Airgram, “U.S. Policy on Unrest in Soviet Occupied Germany,” 30 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/9-3053 (FOIA to author). See also NSC 174, “U.S. Policy Towards the Soviet Satellites in Eastern Europe,” 11 December 1953. An excellent analysis of NSC 174 appears in Marchio, *Rhetoric and Reality*, 179-190.

²⁴³ Jackson to Dulles, 8 August 1953, *FRUS, 1952-54*, VII, 611-14.

²⁴⁴ On the Moscow trip see Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 93-101.

²⁴⁵ Schenk, *Im Vorzimmer der Diktatur*, 226-31.

²⁴⁶ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 28 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/2853.

psychological effect and thereby no longer give any opportunity for encouraging manifestation of dissatisfaction or defiance among the East Zone population.”²⁴⁷

More importantly, the alleviation of some of the economic grievances that had triggered the June uprising and the implementation of the New Course helped lessen the program’s effect. So did the heavy Soviet economic aid, which, U.S. observers estimated, “could result in [a] significant rise in living standard even by the end of this year.”²⁴⁸ During a visit by a high-level SED delegation to Moscow on August 20-22, 1953, the Soviets granted the GDR substantial economic aid, and also elevated both countries’ diplomatic missions to embassies as a signal of the USSR’s commitment to the GDR (Semyonov was named Soviet ambassador).²⁴⁹ By mid-September, internal SED analyses more frequently referred to “positive discussions” about the food program among the population.²⁵⁰ Indeed, there were signs that East Germans, even within the Protestant Church (one of the strongest centers of resistance within the GDR), were getting wary of being used as tools of American propaganda.²⁵¹ Despite the food program, Americans came to realize that the “regime [was] keeping [the] situation in hand without overtly greatly increasing police control.”²⁵² Commenting on the Communist reaction to the food program, HICOG pointed out that “two things stood out”: GDR authorities neither closed off the sector border, thus keeping the East Berliners from getting packages, nor inflicted severe punishments on food recipients whom they apprehended.²⁵³

The latter point proved to be a misperception. As the Ulbricht regime reestablished its grip on party and population, its repressive measures became more severe. Following a first wave of arrests on June 18, an estimated 13,000 people were arrested throughout late June and July in response to the uprising. A second wave of strikes in mid-July only reinforced the SED leadership’s efforts to expand its repressive and disciplinary apparatus, resulting in a massive expansion of the state security system and barracked People’s Police. The growing SED assertiveness reflected rising success in mobilizing party activists, especially in the resistant large

²⁴⁷ Reinstein to General Smith, 25 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/8-2553.

²⁴⁸ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 29 July 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/7-2953.

²⁴⁹ See Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 110-114.

²⁵⁰ Abteilung Leitende Organe der Partei und Massenorganisationen, “Informationsbericht,” 12 September 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/5/563.

²⁵¹ Probst D.H. Grüber (1891-1975), Plenipotentiary of the Council of the Protestant Church of Germany (EKD), had as early as 21 July 1953 indicated his opposition to the food program as a form of “psychological warfare.” He publicly denounced the food program in a sermon on 26 July 1953 as “spiritual poison war.” Church associates of Bischof Dibelius, the leading figure within the (East) German Church, however, approved of the food scheme. Grüber to Beyling, 21 July 1953; Report by Grötschel on a conversation with Grüber, 22 July 1953, SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/456. U.S. officials remarked that “it cannot be said with any definitiveness to what extent his ideas on this subject are shared.” HICOG Berlin to Department of State, 11 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/8-1153. For Adenauer’s concern with Probst Grüber’s criticism, see Otto Lenz, *Im Zentrum der Macht. Das Tagebuch von Staatssekretär Lenz 1951-1953* [Inside the Center of Power. The Diary of State Secretary Lenz 1951-1953], ed. by Klaus Gotto, Hans-Otto Kleinmann and Reinhard Schreiner (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1989), 677.

²⁵² HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 29 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.00/8-2953.

²⁵³ HICOG Berlin to Department of State, 17 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/9-1753.

plants, and in improving the discipline of police and state security to the degree where the latter were able without Soviet help to break up small-scale gatherings before they got out of hand.²⁵⁴ Due to the liquidation of potential resistance and opposition, U.S. officials on the scene in Berlin predicted in November 1953 that a “June 17 repetition” was “at present unlikely.”²⁵⁵

Later that fall, in a number of political trials in the GDR, numerous people were found guilty of “nefarious activities” as “Western agents.” Indeed, the American sponsorship of the food program facilitated the regime’s efforts to establish more persuasively the theory that the June 17 uprising did not reflect genuine popular dissatisfaction but had been a Western plot as well, thus blurring the distinction between the two events and implicitly legitimizing harsh countermeasures.²⁵⁶ By arresting workers for legal transgressions connected with the food packages, the GDR’s rulers used the food program to expand the scope of action against those active in the June 17 uprising. Moreover, on August 26, the SED politburo decided to make an all-out effort in the “fight against the reactionary broadcasts of RIAS” with the objective of effectively reducing the reception of the station throughout the GDR.²⁵⁷ As the Ulbricht regime was “surviving [the] first post-June 17 test of strength caused by the US food offer”²⁵⁸ and enlisting Soviet support, U.S. observers speculated that “the program may in fact have increased somewhat the strength of the regime by furnishing it with an opportunity to prove for the first time after June 17 that it could still without the active intervention of Soviet troops maintain a degree of control over a hostile population.”²⁵⁹

Perhaps the surest sign of the growing success of Ulbricht’s crisis management was a Soviet-GDR initiative in the field of German unification. Despite the fact that the June uprising had shattered any semblance that the Communist regime was representative of its people, the GDR Council of Ministers as early as July 15 called for negotiations between East and West German representatives. On August 15, the Soviets sent a note to the Western powers which called for the formation of a German government composed of representatives of the two German parliamentary bodies, with elections to be carried out thereafter. In September, the Sixteenth Plenum of the SED Central Committee proposed all-German talks on reunification.

²⁵⁴ Indeed, HICOG Berlin reported on 6 August 1953 that the use of Soviet troops against unrest in the GDR caused by SED countermeasures had been “very limited.” HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 6 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.00/8-653.

²⁵⁵ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 18 November 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/11-1853.

²⁵⁶ Minutes, Politburo meeting 58/53, 4 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2/312. The State Department had obtained information to the effect that the Soviets were planning to build a powerful transmitter of approximately 300 kw power to be used in Berlin presumably to compete with RIAS. By 1953, there was a clear realization within the Eisenhower Administration that “present RIAS coverage can be drastically reduced with the possible exception of Berlin alone” by Soviet/GDR interference and jamming. Indeed, administration officials admitted that “there is no complete long run solution to the RIAS problem short of a political arrangement or stoppage of the radio war by the Soviet Union.” Memo re RIAS radio station, T.H.E. Nesbitt to C.D. Jackson, n.d., C.D. Jackson Records, DDEL, Box 5.

²⁵⁷ Minutes, Politburo meeting 65/53, 26 August 1953, SAPMO-BArch, IV 2/2/319; “Streng Vertraulich,” SAPMO-BArch, NL 90/437; HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 6 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/8-653.

²⁵⁸ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 6 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762B.00/8-653.

²⁵⁹ HICOG Berlin to Department of State, 17 September 1953, NA, RG 59, 862B.49/9-1753.

The Eisenhower Administration recognized that the Soviet and East German moves were desperate attempts to regain the initiative, to bolster the shaky GDR regime, and to influence the Bundestag elections to Adenauer's detriment.²⁶⁰ Yet, in the face of strong anti-regime feelings throughout Germany this "incessant belaboring of the all-German theme" struck American diplomats as "somewhat puzzling."²⁶¹ Even earlier, U.S. intelligence data had indicated that, in an effort to "gain credit for GDR government and SED for effectuating New Course and as a proof [of] internal stability of [the] regime," the East German Communists were deliberating the abolition of the hated interzonal passes and the security belt, a 5 km-wide strip that reached from the Baltic to the CSR on the East-West German demarcation line.²⁶² Bolstered by Soviet support, Americans came to realize that the Ulbricht regime was there to stay.

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By the time the American-sponsored food program ended, it had managed to delay significantly the internal consolidation of the East German state and place the Soviets on the defensive. In demonstrating Western interest in the fate of the East Germans, it nurtured resistance sentiment in the GDR and "kept the pot simmering." Yet, ultimately, it could not prevent Ulbricht from regaining control and may indeed have helped him to do so. By heightening threat perceptions on the part of the Soviets, the food program's destabilizing effects also increased Moscow's interest in achieving a permanent consolidation of the GDR. This enhanced Soviet fear of losing the GDR, in turn, gave Ulbricht additional leverage in his efforts to obtain desired economic and political support and concessions which the Kremlin had previously resisted granting.²⁶³

While containing the Soviet political and diplomatic offensive in Germany, the food program assumed increasing importance in boosting Adenauer's election chances and, consequently, prospects for Western Germany's military integration. Indeed, by heightening the atmosphere of crisis in the GDR, the food program underlined the need for strong Western European defenses. Thus, when British, French, and West German criticism of the program mounted, and the aid program seemed to outrun its advantages by threatening Western unity, it was eventually abandoned.

The legacy of America's first experience in the Cold War with a spontaneous anti-communist revolt in Europe which had the potential for a "rollback" of Soviet power—presaging crises in Poland (1956, 1970, 1980-81), Hungary (1956), and Czechoslovakia (1968)—is thus an

²⁶⁰ Department of State to HICOG Bonn, 17 August 1953, DDEL, DDEP, Ann Whitman files, International Series, Box 14.

²⁶¹ HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 26 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.00/8-2653. On the background of the note see Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, 106-110.

²⁶² HICOG Berlin to Secretary of State, 17 August 1953, NA, RG 59, 762.0221/8-1753 (FOIA).

²⁶³ As Hope Harrison points out, this pattern was to underlie the dynamics of Soviet-East German relations in subsequent years, particularly during the Berlin Crisis of 1958-61. See Harrison, *The Bargaining Power*, *passim*.

ambiguous one. Indeed, it contributed to a reassessment by the Eisenhower Administration of the means and goals—and limits—of “liberation” as policy in the fall of 1953. America’s response to the East German uprising revealed that the “rollback” policy lacked any coherent operational basis for its implementation. While the U.S. had encouraged and nurtured resistance to Soviet power in Eastern Europe, little had been done to fully conceptualize the vague notions of “rollback” and liberation as elements of a coherent strategy and to provide a sound operational basis for all contingencies. Though considered a brilliant success and a model for future rollback operations, even a program as limited in scope as the food aid for the GDR ultimately fell prey to anxieties within the administration and among the Western allies over “pushing too far.”

These anxieties stemmed, to a large extent, from considerations of overall American policy in Europe. Ultimately, policy towards Eastern Europe, and thus the food program, were functions of U.S. policy toward Western Europe and the Cold War in general. Rather than humanitarian relief or active rollback, the program was a superb exercise in double containment, containing the Soviet threat as well as German nationalism. The food program proved extraordinarily effective in deflecting and discrediting the Soviet peace offensive and gaining support for Adenauer but less so in respect to actually rolling back Soviet power. The meaning of the uprising to American policy, then, was instrumental in that it offered an opportunity to reinforce, by bolder rhetoric and means, Western policies which aimed, in the short run, at achieving a position of strength in the Cold War through West European military integration. Acknowledging Soviet military leverage in East Germany, yet at the same time undermining any chances of successful negotiations, U.S. policy, in the short run, resulted in fostering German division, putting off reunification—the hope of the June 1953 rioters—only for the distant future.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christian F. Ostermann (Washington, D.C.) is a doctoral candidate at the University of Hamburg and a fellow of the Gerda Henkel Foundation (Düsseldorf). In 1993/1994, he was awarded the Stuart L. Bernath Dissertation Grant and the Stull Holt Dissertation Fellowship of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations. His dissertation of which this Working Paper is a part, is on United States policy toward the GDR, 1945/49-1963.

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