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A Chance for Peace?

The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953–1955

By Geoffrey Roberts
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Christian F. Ostermann, Series Editor

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A Chance for Peace?

The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953-1955¹

Introduction

Was there a chance to end the Cold War after Stalin's death in March 1953? The historical consensus is that while significant changes in Soviet domestic politics and foreign policy somewhat enhanced the prospects for a sustained *détente* with the West, any opportunities to end the Cold War were fleeting at best. Important in this regard is the perceived impact of the popular uprising in East Germany in June 1953. This event, it is commonly argued, shattered Soviet illusions about communist prospects in Germany, to which Moscow responded by abandoning its one-Germany policy. The Soviet adoption of a two-Germanies strategy which placed priority on propping up the GDR meant that a negotiated resolution of the German question was blocked, setting the scene for a deepening of Cold War divisions in Europe and for periods of intense confrontation in the late 1950s and early 1960s.²

The problem with this version of events is that far from dropping the one-Germany policy, the Soviets ostensibly pursued this goal with even more vigor after the Berlin uprising. At the Berlin Conference of Foreign Ministers in January-February 1954 the Soviets proposed the formation of a provisional all-German government that would organize all-German elections leading to the rapid reunification of the country. This proposal was coupled with a radical plan to replace the Cold War blocs with pan-European collective security structures. Crucially, European collective security was projected as the context in which agreement could be reached on the terms and process of Germany's reunification. This dual policy of European collective security, on the one

¹ This paper is based on research conducted in the *Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsi* (hereafter: AVPRF) in 2004-2008. Another important source of archive material were microfilmed files from the *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Noveishei Istorii* (hereafter: RGANI), made available by Mark Kramer and the Cold War Studies Program at Harvard University. I was also able to work on the newly-released materials of Molotov's personal *fond* in the *Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii* (hereafter: RGASPI), but the documents in these files do not, in general, post-date Stalin's death.

² See, for example, K. Larres and K. Osgood (eds.), *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), especially the Introduction by Mark Kramer.

hand, and German unity, on the other, was proposed again by the Soviets at the July 1955 Geneva Summit and at the Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference in October-November 1955. Based on the public record of events it seems that the ‘chance for peace’ after Stalin’s death was actually a prolonged process rather than a momentary opportunity.

Recent work by Russian historians supports this conclusion, revealing that Moscow’s extensive campaign to end the Cold War was far from being a mere propaganda exercise. In her overview of Soviet security policy in 1954-1955, Natalia Yegorova emphasizes that Moscow’s search for new approaches to the resolution of Cold War disputes was genuine, as were proposals for pan-European collective security.³ A similar picture emerges in N. E. Bystrova’s study of postwar bloc formation in Europe, which charts Moscow’s consistent, if ill-fated efforts, to resist the further polarization of the Cold War in the years after Stalin’s death.⁴ According to F. I. Novik’s detailed research on the USSR’s Germany policy in 1953-1955, Moscow’s proposals on German unity were seriously intended and it was only in mid-1955—at the time of West Germany’s admission to NATO and the establishment of the Warsaw Treaty Organization—that the Soviets began to fully embrace the two Germanies strategy.⁵ In a series of articles on the Soviet Union and the German question Alexei Filitov reaches much the same conclusions as Novik, while arguing that Foreign Minister Vyacheslav M. Molotov was the main architect of Moscow’s pro-détente policy—a role usually ascribed to Nikita Khrushchev, Stalin’s successor as party leader. Filitov, however, depicts Khrushchev as a somewhat hawkish figure who sabotaged efforts by Molotov and the Soviet foreign ministry to broker a deal with the West on the German question.⁶

³ N. I. Yegorova, “Evropeiskaya Bezopasnost’, 1954-1955gg: Poiski Novykh Podkhodov” in N.I. Yegorova & A. O. Chubar’yan (eds.), *Kholodnaya Voyna, 1945-1963gg: Istoricheskaya Retrospektiva*, Olma-Press: Moscow 2003. Also: N.I. Yegorova, “Ponyatie ‘Razryadka’ v 1950-ye gody: Sovetskaya i Zapadnaya Interpretatsii” in N.I. Yegorova & A.O. Chubar’yan (eds.), *Kholodnaya Voyna i Politika Razryadki: Diskussionnye Problemy*, vol. 1, Institut Vseobshchei Istorii: Moscow 2003.

⁴ N.E. Bystrova, *SSSR i Formirovanie Voennno-Blokogo Protivostoyaniya v Evrope (1945-1955gg)*, vol.2, Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii: Moscow 2005, chapters 3-4.

⁵ F.I. Novik, “*Ottepel’*” i *Inertsia Khlodnoi Voiny (Germanskaya Politika SSSR v 1953-1955gg.)*, Institut Rossiiskoi Istorii: Moscow 2001.

⁶ A.M. Filitov, “Sovetskii Souz i Germanskii Vopros v Period Pozdnego Stalinizma” in I. V. Gaiduk & N. I. Yegorova (eds.), *Stalin i Xholodnaya Voyna*, Institut Vseobshchei Istorii: Moscow 1998; “SSSR i GDR: god 1953-i”, *Voprosy Istorii*, no. 7, 2000, pp.123-135; “SSSR i Germanskii Vopros: Povоротnye Punkty (1941-1961)” in Yegorova & Chubar’yan *Kholodnaya Voyna, 1945-1963gg*; “Nota 10 Marta 1952 Goda: Prodolzhaushchayasya Diskussiya” in B.M. Tupolv (eds.), *Rossiya i Germaniya*, Nauka: Moscow 2004; and “The Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and the Austrian State Treaty” in A. Suppan, G. Stourzh, W.

This paper builds on this new Russian historiography and explores Moscow's willingness to negotiate a wide-ranging settlement of Cold War disputes in Europe during the first 2-3 years after Stalin's death. It argues that extensive new evidence from the Russian archives shows that the Soviets were open to a radical compromise on the German question and to serious discussions about the establishment of pan-European collective security structures—negotiations that might have led to an end of the Cold War in the mid-1950s. Indeed, by the time of the Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference, the Soviet campaign for collective security in Europe was on the verge of a major breakthrough, when the Western powers themselves proposed pan-European collective security arrangements in exchange for all-German elections leading to German unity. Molotov tried to find a way forward in these negotiations, but Khrushchev, supported by the rest of the Soviet leadership, blocked any deal involving a trade-off of German unity for pan-European collective security. In the end, the Soviet campaign to end the Cold War was stymied by Kremlin politics. However, a more flexible Western response to Moscow's proposals for European collective security at an earlier stage in the negotiations might have changed the dynamics of the struggle between Khrushchev and Molotov over foreign policy and opened the door to a settlement of the German question.

The Post-Stalin Soviet Peace Offensive

The traditional starting point for analyses of post-Stalin Soviet foreign policy is the so-called 'peace offensive' launched at the dictator's funeral on 9 March 1953. The main speaker was Georgii Malenkov, the newly-elected Chairman of the Council of Ministers (i.e. the Prime Minister). According to Malenkov "the Soviet Union has conducted and continues to conduct a consistent policy of the preservation and strengthening of peace, a policy of struggle against the preparation and unleashing of a new war, a policy of international co-operation and the development of business-like relations between all countries, a policy proceeding from the Leninist position concerning the possibility of prolonged coexistence and peaceful competition between two different

Mueller (eds.), *Der Osterreichische Staatsvertrag 1955*, Osterreichischen Akademie Der Wissenschaften: Vienna 2005.

systems—the capitalist and the socialist.”⁷ A few days later, at a session of the Supreme Soviet, Malenkov stated that “there was no disputed or unresolved problem that could not be resolved on the basis of mutual agreement between interested parties. This applies to our relations with all states, including our relations with the United States of America. A state interested in the preservation of peace can be confident, now and in the future, of the durability of the peace policy of the Soviet Union.”⁸

The peace offensive continued at the United Nations in April with a call by Andrei Vyshinskii, the Soviet representative at the UN, for a peace pact between Britain, China, France, the Soviet Union and the United States.⁹ This was not a new proposal, however. Vyshinskii had first put forward the idea in a speech to the UN in 1949 and in 1951-1952 the Soviet-led peace movement waged a major campaign for the conclusion of such a pact. One of the tactics employed was a mass petition that, according to Soviet records, garnered nearly 600 million signatures—100 million more than the famous Stockholm Appeal to ban nuclear weapons.¹⁰

The peace pact also featured in Malenkov’s Central Committee report to the 19th party congress in October 1952:

There exists another perspective, the perspective of preserving peace, the perspective of peace between peoples. This perspective demands the prohibition of war propaganda...the prohibition of atomic and bacteriological weapons, progressive reductions in the armed forces of the great powers, the conclusion of a peace pact between those powers, the growth of trade between countries, the restoration of a single international market, and other such measures in the spirit of strengthening peace.¹¹

⁷ Malenkov funeral oration in *Pravda*, 10 March 1953.

⁸ “Zasedanie Verkhovnogo Soveta Souza SSSR: Rech’ Predsedatel Soveta Ministrov Souza SSSR Tovarishcha G.M. Malenkova”, *Pravda*, 16 March 1953.

⁹ “Vystuplenie A.Ya. Vyshinskogo v Politicheskoi Komitete General’noi Assamblei OON...9 Aprelya 1953 goda”, *Pravda*, 11 April 1953.

¹⁰ On the peace pact campaign: RGASPI, f.82, o.2, d.1397-1404. The data on the petition is in d.1402, l.92ff.

¹¹ In the draft of Malenkov’s speech this section was more elaborate and called specifically for a 50-year non-aggression pact between the great powers and the convening of an international peace conference. But the speech was edited by Stalin and the remarks quoted substituted. The various drafts of Malenkov’s speech may be found in RGASPI, f.592, o.1, d.6-9. The text was circulated to all politburo members for comment but only Stalin made any significant changes, in this case see: d.6, l.5.

As these remarks by Malenkov show, the post-Stalin peace offensive was not as novel as many historians think and was, in fact, a continuation of the peace campaigns of the late Stalin era. But there was change as well as continuity in Moscow's foreign policy and many of Stalin's pet policies were abandoned after his death: the anti-Zionist campaign was curtailed and diplomatic relations restored with Israel; demands for Turkish territorial concessions were dropped, as was the claim to a share in the control of the Black Sea Straits; the conflict with Tito's Yugoslavia was ended and ambassadors exchanged with Belgrade, paving the way for a full scale reconstruction of Soviet-Yugoslav relations; and, most importantly, the logjam in armistice negotiations in Korea was broken and a truce agreed in July 1953.

Western leaders responded to these changes in Soviet foreign policy with their own initiatives and proposals. On 16 April President Eisenhower delivered a major speech in which he spoke of a 'chance for a just peace' and on 11 May, Winston Churchill, the British Prime Minister, renewed his call for a summit of the leaders of the great powers. Moscow responded to the Eisenhower speech with the publication of a long front-page article in *Pravda* on 25 April.¹² Unsigned, the article was, in fact, the new Soviet leadership's first major statement on foreign policy. Drafted by two *Pravda* journalists, the text was corrected by Molotov and then circulated to Presidium (i.e. Politburo) members for detailed comment.¹³ While the article stressed the essential continuity of Soviet foreign policy and rebutted Eisenhower's criticism of Soviet policies, its tone was much less belligerent than the equivalent pronouncements of the Stalin era, emphasizing the USSR's readiness to negotiate the resolution of outstanding problems.

One specific issue raised in the article was the German question: "to conclude a peace treaty with Germany as rapidly as possible, enabling the German people to reunite into a single state and to take their proper place in the community of peace-loving nations, and then to withdraw the occupation forces from Germany, the maintenance of which is an added burden to the German people." A month later *Pravda* returned to the German question in another long front-page article, this time replying to Churchill's call

¹² "K Vystupleniu Prezidenta Eizenkhauera", *Pravda*, 25 April 1953.

¹³ The drafts of the article, together with Molotov's comments and corrections may be found in AVPRF, f.06, o.12, p.27, d.413 and d.414. The existence of the latter file was brought to my attention by Jaclyn Stanke's Ph.D. thesis: *Danger and Opportunity: Eisenhower, Churchill and the Soviet Union after Stalin, 1953*, Emory University 2001, pp.252-254.

for a great power summit. Again, the editorial was generally positive, but Churchill was criticized for not mentioning the Yalta and Potsdam agreements on the establishment of a united, peace-loving, and democratic Germany: “the restoration of a united Germany has decisive importance not only for Germany but for the safeguarding of peace in Europe and in the whole world...the dismemberment of Germany means the restoration of a hotbed of war danger in the very center of Europe.”¹⁴

Rethinking the German Question

The resolution of the German question remained the central preoccupation of Soviet foreign policy after Stalin’s death. But, again, continuity was the hallmark of Soviet policy, rather than change. Soviet policy on the German question after Stalin was essentially the same as when the dictator was still alive: the reunification of Germany as a peace-loving and democratic state—a goal to be achieved by the negotiation of a peace treaty that would guarantee German neutrality and non-alignment in the Cold War.

Soviet demands for the reunification of Germany dated back to the Potsdam Conference of 1945 and were reiterated at every ensuing international discussion of the German question.¹⁵ But Soviet policy took a new turn in March 1952 with the publication of a diplomatic note to the Western powers proposing the immediate negotiation of a peace treaty leading to German unity. Much of the historical debate about this note has revolved around the interpretation of Stalin’s intentions: was he serious about an agreement on German unity or was he just playing politics?¹⁶ It is a debate that is

¹⁴ “K Sovremennomu Mezhdunarodnomu Polozheniu”, *Pravda*, 24 May 1953. On the Soviet response to the Churchill proposal for a summit see further U. Bar-Noi, “The Soviet Union and Churchill’s Appeals for High-Level Talks, 1953-1954: New Evidence from the Russian Archives”, *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 9, No. 3, November 1998, pp. 110-133.

¹⁵ Postwar Soviet policy on the German question is amply documented in J. Laufer & G. Kynin (eds), *SSSR i Germanskii Vopros, 1941-1949*, 3 vols, Moscow 1996, 2000, 2003. Since the publication of these volumes some new material has come to light in the Molotov files in RGASPI, including the directives to the Paris session of the Council of Foreign Ministers in June 1949 (f.82, o.2, d.1164, l.15-86).

¹⁶ The debate on this question has been particularly sharp among German historians. See R. Steininger, *The German Question and the Stalin Note of 1952*, Columbia University Press: New York 1990; J. Zarusky (ed.), *Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952*, Oldenbourg: Munich 2002; G. Wettig’s, “The Soviet Union and Germany in the Late Stalin Period, 1950-1953” in F. Gori & S. Pons (eds.), *The Soviet Union and Europe in the Cold War, 1949-1953*, Macmillan: London 1996; “Stalin and German Reunification: Archival Evidence on Soviet Foreign Policy in Spring 1952”, *The Historical Journal*, 37, 2, 1994; and *Bereitschaft zur Einhat in Freiheit? Die Sowjetische Deutschland-Politik, 1945-1955*, Munchen 1999; W. Loth’s,

unlikely to ever be resolved since the evidence is ambiguous and it may be that not even Stalin was clear about his preferences. What does seem clear, however, is that those who formulated Soviet policy on the German question—Molotov and his officials in the foreign ministry—took the proposals on German unity seriously, both in 1952 and again in 1953 when they revived them after Stalin’s death.¹⁷

The March 1952 proposal was a belated response to the Plevan Plan of October 1950 that proposed the establishment a European Army and a European Defense Ministry – a plan that subsequently evolved into proposals for West German rearmament and the integration of the FRG into a European Defense Community (EDC). In their note the Soviets presented—for the first time—a draft of the main provisions of their preferred peace treaty. Under the Soviet plan there would be a united Germany; allied occupation forces would withdraw from the country within a year; Germany’s armed forces would be limited to levels necessary for national defense; and Germany would pledge not to enter into any coalition or military alliance directed against states that had fought against it during the last war, making it ineligible to participate in NATO or the EDC. The Soviet note spoke also of creating “conditions conducive to the speediest possible formation of an all-German government, expressing the will of the German people.”

In their reply to the Soviet note on 25 March the American, British, and French governments reiterated their longstanding call for free all-German elections that would elect a government which would *then* negotiate a peace treaty. As well as negotiating the peace treaty, a future all-German government would be free to enter into any associations that were compatible with the principles of the UN, including “a purely defensive European community which will preserve freedom, prevent aggression, and preclude the revival of militarism.” In their responding note on 9 April the Soviets conceded there

Stalin’s Unwanted Children: The Soviet Union, the German Question and the Founding of the GDR, Palgrave: London 1998; “The Origins of Stalin’s Note of 10 March 1952”, *Cold War History*, vol. 4, no. 2, January 2004; and *Die Sowjetunion und die Deutsche Frage*, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: Göttingen 2007; J. Laufer, “Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 im Lichte neuer Quellen”, *Vierteljahrshäfte Fur Zeitgeschichte*, January 2004; and P. Ruggenthaler (ed), *Stalins grosser Bluff: Die Geschichte der Stalin-Note in Dokumenten der sowjetischen Führung*, Oldenbourg: Munich 2007.

¹⁷ On Molotov and the foreign ministry’s role in relation to the March 1952 note see: S. Bjornstad, *The Soviet Union and German Unification during Stalin’s Last Years*, Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies: Oslo 1998. Bjornstad’s findings may be supplemented by further materials in the newly-declassified Molotov files in RGASPI that contain the various policy drafts prepared for Stalin in the run up to the March 1952 note: f.82, o.2, d.1169-1170. German translations of a number of these documents may be found in Ruggenthaler *op.cit.*

could be discussions of free all-German elections, but precluded a united Germany from joining any coalition or military alliance that might be directed against the USSR. The Soviet-Western exchange of notes continued for several more months,¹⁸ but by the end of the year the Soviets had lost interest: a reply was drafted to the final Western note of 23 September but was never issued.¹⁹ Not until spring 1953 were Molotov and his foreign ministry officials ready to try again.

Apart from the opening provided by Stalin's death, some specific developments prompted an internal review of the Soviet position on the German question. On 18 April 1953 Ivan Tugarinov, head of the Soviet foreign ministry's Small Committee on Information, issued an information note on Western policy and the German question. Tugarinov pointed out that while the Western powers were trying to push through the ratification of the Paris-Bonn agreements on the establishment of the EDC they were facing growing political opposition in France and West Germany. Tugarinov also noted that the Soviet peace offensive had raised expectations in the West that the USSR would take the initiative and propose a four-power conference on the German question.²⁰ That same day Georgii Pushkin, the former head of the Soviet diplomatic mission to Berlin, and Mikhail Gribanov, the head of the Third European Department of the Soviet foreign ministry (responsible for Germany), sent Molotov a memorandum proposing a new initiative on the German question. They pointed out that the Western powers feared an activist Soviet policy on Germany and proposed (a) various measures to strengthen the authority of the East German government and (b) the formation of a provisional all-German government composed of representatives of the two existing German governments that would be charged principally with drafting an election law for the conduct of all-German elections.²¹ This new proposal for a provisional all-German

¹⁸ The texts of the notes may be found in a number of sources; in this instance I have used: *The Efforts Made by the Federal Republic of Germany to Re-Establish the Unity of Germany by Means of All-German Elections*, issued by the Federal Ministry for All-German Affairs, Bonn 1954, pp. 84-110. The drafts of the Soviet replies to the various western notes may be found in RGASPI, f.82, o.2, d.1170-1171.

¹⁹ "Proekt Noty Pravitel'stvu SShA", AVPRF, o.41, p.271, d.19, l.58-65.

²⁰ "O Politike Zapadnykh Derzhav po Germanskomu Voprosu", AVPRF f.082, o.41, p.271, d.18 l.3-29. This document is reproduced in English translation in C.F. Ostermann (ed.), *Uprising in East Germany 1953*, Central European Press: Budapest 2001 doc. 5 pp. 52-56.

²¹ "Zapiska po Germanskomu Voprosu", AVPRF, f.082, o.41, p.271, d.19, l.13-19. This document is reproduced in Ostermann *op.cit* doc. 6 pp. 67-70.

government formed the centerpiece of a further series of internal memoranda²² which culminated in a note to Molotov on 28 April signed by Yakov Malik, the former Soviet representative at the UN (and soon to be the new ambassador to the UK) and Vladimir Semyonov, the former political head of the Soviet control commission in Germany, as well as by Pushkin and Gribanov. The four officials argued that in order to retain the initiative on the German question, the USSR should not only propose a provisional all-German government but also the immediate withdrawal of all occupation forces after the formation of such a government. This dual proposal would, the memorandum argued, undermine the Western demand for all-German elections prior to the negotiation of a peace treaty.²³ The tactical-political advantages of proposing a withdrawal of occupation forces upon the formation of an all-German provisional government (as opposed to the existing Soviet policy of withdrawal a year after the signature of a peace treaty) were stressed by Semyonov in a further memorandum to Molotov on 2 May. His point was that the negotiation of a peace treaty could delay the withdrawal of occupation forces for years, whereas the formation of a provisional all-German government offered more immediate prospects in that regard, which would appeal to German public opinion and would help the Soviets regain the initiative in the struggle for reunification on a democratic and peaceful basis.

While Semyonov, like the other foreign ministry officials, advanced tactical reasons for a new policy initiative, he was also clear about the strategic purpose of the new proposals. As he put it in the first paragraph of his memorandum:

The crux of the German question during the post-war period has been the matter of the national reunification of Germany. A struggle between the Soviet Union and the GDR on the one side, and the USA, England, France, and the Bonn government on the other has occurred... Since 1945, the entire postwar policy regarding the German question has been built on defending demands for German reunification on a peaceful and democratic basis, and later also on demands for a swift conclusion of a

²² “Zapiska po Germanskomu Voprosu”, 21/4/53, AVPRF, f.082, o.41, p.271, d.18, l.30-43;

“Predlozheniya po Germanskomu Voprosu”, 24/4/53, AVPRF, f.082, o.41, p.271, d.19, l.1-12; and

“Predlozheniya po Germanskomu Voprosu”, 24/4/53, AVPRF, F.082, o.41, p.271, d.19, l.20-30.

²³ “O Nashikh Dal’neishikh Meropriyatiyakh po Germanskomu Voprosu”, AVPRF f.082, o.41, p.271, d.18, l.44-48. This document is reproduced in English translation in Ostermann *op.cit* doc.7, pp. 71-73.

peace treaty, to be followed by the withdrawal of all occupation forces from Germany.²⁴

On the basis of these internal ruminations, Molotov and the foreign ministry drafted proposals for the Presidium in early May outlining the need for a new initiative on the German question, the heart of which was the call for a provisional all-German government.²⁵ However, these proposals bore no immediate fruit because the Soviet leadership's attention was elsewhere. There was a growing political crisis in the GDR, caused by the massive migration of East Germans to West Germany, over 120,000 in the first four months of 1953 alone. Migration on such a scale was politically debilitating, economically threatening, and a major contributor to growing social discontent in the GDR. The immediate cause of the migration crisis was the program for the accelerated construction of socialism embarked upon by the GDR in mid-1952 and the associated higher work requirements imposed upon the population. Faced with mounting evidence of popular dissatisfaction with the East German government, Moscow moved to stabilize the situation.²⁶ On 2 June the Soviet government adopted a resolution, drafted by Molotov, Malenkov, and Beria, "On Measures to Improve the Health of the Political Situation in the GDR." The East German communists were ordered to abandon the forced construction of socialism and to implement a series of economic and political reforms designed to recover their popularity and authority. Among the measures proposed were "to put the tasks of the political struggle to reestablish the national unity of Germany and to conclude a peace treaty at the center of the attention of the broad mass of people both

²⁴ "Zapiska po Germanskomu Voprosu", AVPRF, f.082, o.41, p.271, d.18, l.52-59. This document is reproduced in English translation in Ostermann *op.cit* doc. 9, pp. 82-85. Semyonov sent another note to Molotov in a similar vein on 5 May: "Spravka po Germanskomu Voprosu", AVPRF, f.082, o.41, p.271, d.19, l.31-38.

²⁵ "O Nashikh Dal'neishikh Meropriyatiyakh po Germanskomu Voprosu" (various drafts), f.06, o.12, p.16, d.259, l.39-73. The paper trail in relation to the Presidium decisions and discussions is, as always, a little murky but this file indicates that the foreign ministry document was considered by the leadership on 5 May and that re-drafted proposals were considered around 10 May. This led to further work on policy statements in mid-May ("Nota po Germanskomu Voprosu" 13/5/53 and "Proekt Noty Pravitel'stvu SShA", 15/5/53 in AVPRF, f.082, o.41, p.271, d.18, l.60-79). One version of the document prepared for the Presidium is translated in Ostermann *op.cit*, doc. 11, pp. 90-96: "On Further Soviet Government Measures Pertaining to the German Question". See also the analysis and documentation in E. Scherstjanoi, "Die Sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik nach Stalins tod 1953: Neue Dokumente aus dem Archiv des Moskauer Ausenministeriums", *Vierteljahrshfte fur Zeitgeschichte*, vol. 46, no. 3, July 1998, pp. 535-543.

²⁶ See M. Kramer, "The Early Post-Stalin Succession Struggle and Upheavals in East-Central Europe", Part 1, *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 1999, especially pp. 12-15, 22-30.

in the GDR and in West Germany.”²⁷ That same day a delegation of East German communist leaders arrived in Moscow for three days of talks with the Soviet leadership. Among the participants was Malenkov, who prepared a statement on developments in East Germany and their connection with the resolution of the German question. Malenkov’s main theme was that Germany’s reunification as a peaceful and democratic state took priority over the construction of socialism in the GDR:

The question of perspectives on the development of the German Democratic Republic cannot be seen in isolation from the task of uniting East and West Germany into a single German state. It should be emphasised that the most important problem of the present international system is the restoration of German unity, of Germany’s transformation into a peaceful democratic state. Some people, it seems, are inclined to think that we put forward the question of the restoration of Germany’s unity in pursuance of some propaganda ends only, that really we are not striving to end the division of Germany, that we are not interested in the restoration of a united Germany. This is a profound error... We consider the unity of Germany and its transformation into a democratic and peace-loving state as the most important condition, as one of the essential guarantees, for the maintenance of European and, consequently, of world security... Profoundly mistaken are those who think that Germany can exist for a long time under conditions of dismemberment in the form of two independent states. To stick to the position of the existence of a dismembered Germany means to keep to the course for a new war... To struggle for the unification of Germany under certain conditions, for its transformation into a peaceful and democratic state means to keep to the course for the prevention of a new World War... On what basis can the unification of Germany be achieved in the current international situation? In our opinion, only on the basis that Germany will be a bourgeois-democratic state. Under present conditions the national unification of Germany on the basis of Germany’s transformation into a land of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the form of people’s democracy is not feasible... Consequently, it is necessary to choose: either the course for the accelerated building of socialism in the GDR, for the independent existence of two Germanies, and that means the course for a third World War, or the abandonment of the accelerated building of socialism in the GDR and the course of the unification of Germany in the form of a bourgeois-democratic state on condition of its transformation into a peaceful and democratic country. This is why, in our opinion, the most pressing task for our German friends is to implement swiftly and decisively the measures which we are recommending for the normalization of the political and economic situation in the GDR and for

²⁷ Ostermann *op.cit* doc. 18 pp.133-136.

safeguarding the future successful solution of the task of unifying Germany and transforming it into a peaceful and democratic state.²⁸

It was a remarkable document by Malenkov. Never before had the political logic of the Soviet position on the German question been so frankly expounded. In both public pronouncements and in the internal foreign ministry documentation the likely political consequences of German reunification for the GDR were consistently elided. The implicit assumption was that a successful struggle for a peaceful and democratic Germany would strengthen the position of the GDR and the West German communists and thereby impact positively on the social and political character of the new German state, which would emerge as some kind of left-wing regime sympathetic to the Soviet Union. No one asked what would happen if this rosy scenario did not materialize and the Soviets had to choose between the strategic advantages of a neutral united Germany and the political imperative of holding on to the communist position in the GDR.

While the degree of clarity in the Malenkov document was unique, what he had to say was in accordance with long-established Soviet policy and with the results of the revisiting of the German question by Molotov and the foreign ministry in April-May 1953. Indeed, after the departure of the GDR delegation from Moscow the foreign ministry continued to formulate documents deploying language and assumptions similar to those contained in Malenkov's speech.²⁹ However, events during the next few weeks had the effect of further narrowing the terms in which the German question could be discussed.

The first event was the June uprising in East Germany. The announcement by the GDR government of a 'New Course' that would moderate the pace of socialist construction was interpreted as a sign of weakness by sections of the population. At the same time the government refused to scale back the higher work requirements; the result was growing popular protest, which blossomed into a full-scale, nationwide political revolt by 16-17 June. According to a Soviet internal report on the revolt, some 450,000

²⁸ RGASPI, f.83, o.1, d.3, l.131-132, 134-136, 141. For a full translation of and commentary on the Malenkov statement see G. Roberts, "Malenkov on the German Question, 2 June 1953", *Cold War International History Project e-Dossier no. 15*. Also: A. Filitov, "'Germany Will Be a Bourgeois-Democratic Republic': The New Evidence from the Personal File of Georgiy Malenkov," *Cold War History*, vol. 6, no. 4, November 2006, pp. 552-555.

²⁹ "Proekt Noty Pravitel'stvu SShA", 8 June 1953, AVPRF f.06, o.121, p.3, d.36, l.1-24.

people went on strike and over 330,000 participated in anti-regime demonstrations.³⁰ While the strikes and demonstrations were relatively easily quelled by the Soviet armed forces stationed in Germany, and at a relatively low cost in human terms,³¹ the revolt had exposed the political vulnerability of the East German communist regime and it led to a redoubling of Soviet efforts to prop up the GDR.

The second event was the fall of Beria and his denunciation at a special plenum of the CPSU Central Committee on 2-7 July 1953. The main charges against Beria (who was under arrest and not present at the plenum) related to his role in domestic politics and his supposed strivings, in conjunction with foreign imperialists, to seize power for himself. But the accusation that he wanted to give up the GDR to the capitalists also played a role in the proceedings, although not as prominently as the other charges. The opening report at the plenum on the “Criminal Anti-party and Anti-state Activities of Beria” was given by Malenkov. In a section on the German question, Malenkov explained why the leadership had felt it necessary to abandon the course of the accelerated construction of socialism in the GDR. Malenkov concluded by saying that “it should be said that Beria, during the discussion of the German question, did not propose that the course for the accelerated building of socialism be corrected; he proposed that any course for the building of socialism in the GDR be abandoned. Given what now is known about Beria, we must reevaluate this point of view. It is clear that this fact characterises him as a bourgeois renegade.”³² Compared to the other calumnies being heaped on Beria this was a mild allegation. But the next speaker in the discussion was Khrushchev, who ratcheted up the rhetoric on Beria and the German question:

The clearest display that he was a provocateur, not a communist, was in relation to the German question when he raised the question of giving up the construction of socialism in order to make concessions to the West. He was asked: what does this mean? It means that 18 million Germans are given up to the Americans? Yes, he replied, it is necessary to form a neutral, democratic Germany. How could there be a neutral, bourgeois

³⁰ “O Sobytyakh 17-19 Iunya 1953g v Berline i GDR i Nekotorykh Vывodakh iz etikh Sobytiĭ”, AVPRF, f.06, o.12a, p.51, d.301, l.1-49. A translation of this document may be found in Ostermann *op.cit* doc. 60.

³¹ According to *ibid* there were 29 fatalities (including 11 party/police/government officials) and 350 wounded (including 83 party/police/government officials).

³² *Lavrentii Beria, 1953: Stenogramma Iul'skogo Plenuma TsK KPSS I Drugie Dokumenty*, Mezhdunarodnyi Fond ‘Demokratiya’: Moscow 1999 p.223.

Germany between us and America? Is this possible?...Beria said that we will conclude an agreement. But what would this agreement be worth? We know the value of agreements. An agreement remains in force if it is reinforced by cannons. If an agreement is not reinforced it never stands. If we were to talk about such an agreement they would laugh at us, would think us naïve. But Beria is not stupid or a fool. He is clever and cunning and treacherous. So he was doing something, perhaps a task given to him, perhaps, the devil only knows, he was given other tasks by his residents.³³ I can't guarantee not. Therefore, I repeat again that he is not a communist, he is a provocateur and he conducted himself like one.³⁴

Molotov spoke next, also attacking Beria on the German question. Beria, he said, had argued, incorrectly, that there could be a peace-loving, *bourgeois* Germany. Molotov accused Beria of attempting to distort the position of the Presidium on the construction of socialism in Germany, pointing out that in discussions with him he (Molotov) had insisted that it was the accelerated construction of socialism that had been a mistake, not the construction of socialism *per se*. Beria's statements on the German question showed, said Molotov, that he had "nothing in common with our party, that he was a person from the bourgeois camp, an anti-Soviet person."³⁵ Molotov was followed in the discussion by Nikolai Bulganin, the defense minister, who said that Beria favoured the liquidation of the GDR and the restoration of a bourgeois Germany.³⁶ In his concluding remarks Malenkov did not return to the German question but the Plenum's formal resolution condemning Beria noted that he had "rejected the course of building socialism in the German Democratic Republic" and wanted to turn the GDR into a bourgeois republic.³⁷

The denunciation of Beria's supposed views on the German question was linked to the June events in the GDR. These disturbances had been characterized by the Soviet authorities, both publicly and privately, as the work of foreign provocateurs.³⁸ By linking Beria with the idea of surrendering the GDR, his former comrades added to the case that he was not just a political renegade and would-be dictator, but also an imperialist agent. The charge against Beria was led by Khrushchev and it may be that his highlighting of

³³ (i.e. foreign intelligence agents – GR)

³⁴ *ibid.* p.97

³⁵ *ibid.* p.102.

³⁶ *ibid.* p.111.

³⁷ *ibid.* p.359.

³⁸ "Kraakh Avantury Inostrannykh Naimitov v Berline", *Pravda*, 23 June 1953.

the German question stemmed from doubts about or opposition to the one Germany policy. Certainly, during the next two years Khrushchev was to emerge as an ardent supporter of the GDR and an exponent of the two Germanies line. Molotov likely saw the need to distance himself from Beria and from the policy on the German question they had both been instrumental in formulating. Molotov's statements at the plenum could also be read as evidence that he, too, was irrevocably committed to the maintenance of the GDR but that conclusion is not consistent with the policy he actually pursued as foreign minister for the next two years—a strategy for the reunification of Germany, if the terms were right.

What was the impact of Beria's condemnation on Soviet foreign policy vis-à-vis the German question? Melvyn P. Leffler has argued that "the invective against Beria illuminated how past experience, ideology, and the distribution of power in the international system militated against an agreement on the unification of Germany."³⁹ This proved to be true in the longer run but the immediate political fall-out from the Beria affair was limited and contradictory: there was no more talk of a united Germany being specifically bourgeois-democratic but the aim of reunifying Germany as a peaceful and democratic state remained official policy. Similarly, while Soviet support for the GDR as a socialist state strengthened, there was, as yet, no hard and fast commitment by Moscow to its separate, long-term existence under communist control.

There seems to have been a pause in foreign ministry deliberations on the German question while the ramifications of the Beria affair worked themselves through the system, but when policymaking resumed at the end of July there was a return to the positions hammered out in April and May. The spur was the receipt on 15 July of a Western diplomatic note proposing a foreign ministers conference on the German question.⁴⁰ On 30 July, Andrei Gromyko, Molotov's deputy, presented him with a draft of a note on the German question. Gromyko noted the statement of 15 July and linked the activism of Western policy on the German question to forthcoming parliamentary elections in West Germany. The note proposed taking measures that would strengthen the Soviet position in Germany, enhance the authority of the GDR "as the basis for the

³⁹ M.P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union and the Cold War*, Hill and Wang: New York 2007, p. 119.

⁴⁰ *The Efforts Made by the Federal Republic of Germany op.cit* pp. 126-127.

restoration of a united Germany as a peace-loving and democratic state,” and create difficulties for Western plans to divide the country and use it as an agency of their aggressive plans in Europe. Among the measures proposed were (a) to agree to a foreign ministers conference, provided it could discuss a peace treaty with Germany and measures to improve international relations in Europe and Asia; (b) to issue a note on the German question proposing the formation of a provisional all-German government; (c) to implement previously proposed economic and political measures to bolster the GDR; (d) to convene a conference of people’s democracies aiming at issuing a statement on the German question and concluding a collective pact of friendship; and (e) to invite to Moscow a delegation from the GDR government and East German political parties.⁴¹ Gromyko, it should be noted, was a candidate member of the central committee and had been present at the July plenum, so he was well aware of the leadership’s rhetoric on Beria and the German question. On 2 August Molotov forwarded the Gromyko draft to the Presidium, which subsequently agreed to all the foreign ministry’s proposals, except for the convening of a conference of people’s democracies.⁴²

The Soviet reply to the Western note of 15 July was issued on 4 August. It agreed to a foreign minister’s conference to discuss the German question but insisted that discussions should also deal with measures to ease international tensions as well as the question of German unity and the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany.⁴³ On 15 August the Soviet government issued a further note, this time specifically on the German question. The note stated that “the restoration of the national unity of a democratic Germany remains a fundamental problem for the German people, the solution of which all the peace-loving peoples of Europe are interested in...there must be no delay in adopting measures which might assist at least the gradual solution of the problem of uniting Germany, of forming an all-German democratic government.” To this end the Soviets proposed that a conference be held within six months to discuss a peace treaty with Germany and that a provisional all-German government should be established:

⁴¹ “Proekt Zapiski v TsK KPSS po Germanskomu Voprosu”, AVPRF, f.06,o.12, p.16,d.264, l.2-7. Ostermann *op.cit* doc. 85 pp. 361-362 contains another version of the same document. Gromyko had recently returned to Moscow after a brief spell as ambassador to Great Britain.

⁴² AVPRF f.06, o.121, p.3, d.36, l.37-39.

⁴³ “Note of the Soviet Government, August 4, 1953,” *New Times*, Supplement, 12 August 1953, pp. 2-4.

[...] such a government might, by direct agreement between East and West Germany, be set up to replace the existing governments of the German Democratic Republic and the German Federal Republic. If this should prove difficult at the present time, the Provisional All-German Government might be set up even though the governments of the GDR and the GFR remained in existence for the time being, in which case the Provisional All-German Government would evidently possess only restricted functions. Even so, the formation of a Provisional All-German Government would represent a real step forward towards the union of Germany, which would be consummated by the formation of an All-German Government on the basis of really free all-German elections.

The note reflected the internal deliberations of the Soviet foreign ministry during the previous months save for one respect: there was no call for the withdrawal of occupation forces upon the formation of an all-German provisional government—an omission prompted presumably by the experience of the June days in the GDR. Instead, there was a proposal to limit expenditure on allied occupation forces. The original 1952 Soviet proposal of withdrawal a year after the signature of a peace treaty also remained on the table.⁴⁴

On 20 August a delegation from the GDR arrived in Moscow for discussions with the Soviet leadership. On its departure three days later a communiqué was issued outlining a series of Soviet concessions that strengthened the East German regime's economic position: reparation payments were to cease from January 1954; Soviet enterprises in Germany would be transferred to the GDR government; Soviet occupation charges would be reduced; all GDR debt to the USSR would be annulled; and trade would be increased between the two countries, including the provision of Soviet loans to the GDR. The Soviet diplomatic mission to the GDR was raised to ambassadorial status and Moscow also agreed to expedite the release of German POWs still held in the USSR.⁴⁵ In his toast to the GDR delegation at a dinner in the Kremlin on 22 August, Malenkov emphasized the need to resist Western plans to divide Germany and the importance of the struggle for German unity on a peace-loving and democratic basis.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ "Note of the Soviet Government to the Governments of France, Great Britain and the USA on the German Question," *New Times*, Supplement, 17 August 1953, pp. 2-6. The Soviets also republished their March 1952 draft peace treaty. On the drafting of this note: AVPRF, f.06, o.12, p.16, d.266.

⁴⁵ "Soviet-German Communiqué", Supplement to *New Times*, no. 35, 1954, pp. 2-4.

⁴⁶ "Speech by G.M. Malenkov", *ibid.* pp. 5-7.

Towards Collective Security

The publication of the Soviet notes of 4 and 15 August was followed by the usual round of rancorous diplomatic exchanges with the West, but by the end of 1953 there was agreement to convene a foreign ministers conference. During the course of this exchange of notes, however, a fundamental shift in the Soviets' policy began to take shape as they moved from the assertion that the resolution of the German question was the key to European security to the standpoint that European security was the key to resolving the German question. By the time Molotov arrived at the Foreign Ministers Conference in Berlin in January 1954, the scene was set for the Soviets to embrace a new grand project, one that took precedence over a peace treaty with Germany: the establishment of a pan-European system of collective security.

Throughout the 1953 exchange of notes the Soviets insisted that the German question had to be discussed alongside measures to reduce international tensions. As Molotov put it at a press conference on 13 November: “[the] settlement of the German problem is intimately bound up with European security and, consequently, with a relaxation of international tensions.”⁴⁷ Three days later, the Western powers issued a note accusing the Soviet Union of making proposals that “would entail the abandonment by France, Great Britain, and the United States of all their plans to safeguard their own security. A defenseless Western Europe appears to be the price demanded by the Soviet government for participation in a conference.”⁴⁸ Evidently stung by this Western counterattack, the Soviet reply on 26 November stated:

The security of the West European countries will be firmly safeguarded if it is based not on the setting up of the West European countries in opposition to the East European countries, but on concerted efforts to safeguard European security...*The Soviet Union is prepared, together with other European countries, to make every effort to safeguard European security through the instrumentality of an appropriate agreement*

⁴⁷ *New Times*, Supplement, 14 November 1953, p. 4.

⁴⁸ *New Times*, Supplement, 28 November 1953, p. 4.

*embracing all the countries of Europe, irrespective of their social system.*⁴⁹ [emphasis added]

Here was the germ of Soviet proposals for pan-European security. Adding urgency to this new policy direction was the growing perception in Moscow that the Western powers were preparing to put forward their own proposals on European collective security.

Throughout the autumn of 1953 Soviet analysts reported on discussions in the Western press about the creation of a system of non-aggression pacts in Europe—a proposal aimed at meeting Moscow’s concerns about West German rearmament and the EDC. Soviet observers traced these discussions back to Churchill’s proposal in May 1953 for a new ‘Locarno.’ This was a reference to the Locarno Pact of 1924 that had assuaged French fears of a German revival by a security guarantee for France’s Eastern borders. The idea was to offer the Soviet Union a similar guarantee in the form of the Western power’s acceptance of the territorial frontiers established in 1945 (i.e. German losses to Poland and the USSR would remain in place) together with various East-West non-aggression agreements. There was also talk of a withdrawal of all foreign forces from a united Germany, of the establishment of demilitarized and neutral zones in central Europe, even of a Western guarantee of Soviet security.⁵⁰ Similar commentaries and analyses figured in Soviet foreign ministry briefing documents on the likely positions of the Western powers at the Berlin conference. The conclusion drawn was that the Western powers would propose guarantees of Soviet security in exchange for progress on the German question and the EDC.⁵¹ These analyses and reports were brought together in a composite note from Semyonov and Pushkin to Molotov on 5 January, which concluded

⁴⁹ *ibid* p. 6.

⁵⁰ “O Planakh Zaklucheniya ‘Pakta o Nenapadenii’ mezhdru Zapadnymi Derzhavami i SSSR”, AVPRF, f.0129, o.37, p.266, d.24, l.135-143; “Vyskazyvaniya Inostrannykh Gosudarstvennykh Deyatelei po Voprosu Predstavlenii Sovetskomu Souzu ‘Garantii Bezopasnosti’”, AVPRF, f.0129, o.37, p.266, d.24, l.145-153; “Obzory Pressy po SShA” (Oct-December 1953), AVPRF, f.0129, o.37, p.265, d.17, l.1-127 *passim*.

⁵¹ “Obzor Pechati Zapadnykh Stran po Voprosu o Predstoyashchem Soveshchanii Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav” AVPRF f.06, o.13-g, p.65, d.28, l.13-24; “Pressa Zapadnykh Stran o Soveshchanii Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav”, AVPRF f.06, o.13-g, p.65, d.28, l.25-51; “Pozitsiya Anglii v Svyazi s Soveshchaniem Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav v Berline”, AVPRF f.06, o.13-g, p.65, d.28, l.62-64; “Pozitsiya SShA v Svyazi s Soveshchaniem Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav v Berline”, AVPRF f.06, o.13-g, p.65, d.28, l.83-85; “Pozitsiya Frantsii po Voprosu o Predstoyashchem Soveshchanii Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav”, AVPRF f.06, o.13-g, p.65, d.28, l.90-116 *passim*.

by drawing attention to Western speculation that the USSR would put forward its own plan for European collective security.⁵²

The first draft of a treaty on European collective security was drawn up by the foreign ministry on 22 December 1953. The basic proposition was that all European states would sign a collective security treaty pledging to support each other in the event of aggression.⁵³ At this stage, however, the Soviets remained locked into the idea that European security revolved around the resolution of the German question rather than the other way around. Only incrementally did pan-European collective security become a major Soviet policy plank at the Berlin Conference. Indeed, Molotov's first draft of the directive for the Soviet delegation, sent to Malenkov and Khrushchev on 3 January, omitted mention of European collective security. This draft directive defined Soviet aims at the conference as (1) to exploit the contradictions between the imperialist powers to disrupt West German rearmament and the formation of the EDC; (2) to strengthen the international position of the Soviet Union; (3) to reduce international tensions, including by convening a five-power conference that the People's Republic of China would attend; and (4) to discuss the question of a peace treaty with Germany and the establishment of a democratic and peace-loving German state. The next day, however, Molotov sent Malenkov and Khrushchev a supplement to this draft which specified that if no agreement were possible on the German question, the Soviet delegation would introduce a new proposal on "Safeguarding Security in Europe"—a proposal specifically designed to combat Western talk and propaganda favoring a "new Locarno." The addendum stated that pending the signature of a peace treaty with Germany, (1) occupation forces should be withdrawn (but the Allies would retain the right to intervene in the event of the threat of German aggression); (2) German armaments should be limited; and (3) there should be an agreement on European collective security.

Molotov's draft was considered by the Presidium on 7 January. We do not know what transpired at the meeting, but on 12 January Gromyko and Pushkin produced a new draft of the directive, which Molotov submitted to Malenkov and Khrushchev the next day. The new draft contained a paragraph on European collective security, but only in the

⁵² "O Proektakh Predostavleniya Zapadnymi Derzhavami 'Garantii' Sovetskому Souzu i Drugim Evropeiskim Stranam," AVPRF, f.082, o.42, p.287, d.35, l.54-70.

⁵³ "Osnovnye Printsipy Obshcheevropeiskoi Organizatsii Bezopasnosti," AVPRF o.13, p.6, d.42, l.14-16.

context of a very detailed set of instructions. On 15 January the Presidium passed a resolution on the draft directive. Again, the content of this resolution are unknown, but two days later Gromyko submitted to Molotov the draft of a detailed proposal for a European collective security treaty. On 20 January this draft was submitted to Malenkov and Khrushchev for their approval.⁵⁴ Hitherto, tactical preparations for the Berlin Conference had concentrated on the German question, with the foreign ministry producing extensive documentation analyzing Western policy on Germany and elaborating the defense of the Soviet policy position.⁵⁵ Now attention switched to possible Western objections to a pan-European collective security treaty.⁵⁶

Moscow's embrace of the idea of European collective security had numerous precedents in the history of Soviet foreign policy. Before the Second World War, Molotov's predecessor as People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Maksim Litvinov, had attempted to negotiate a regional security pact for Eastern Europe in the so-called 'Eastern Locarno' negotiations of 1934-1935. After the USSR joined the League of Nations in 1934 Litvinov became a champion of collective security within the League framework. During the 1939 negotiations for a triple alliance with Britain and France, Litvinov proposed—and Molotov subsequently pursued—an all-embracing system of European security guarantees as part of a project to contain German aggression. During the Second World War Stalin was an enthusiastic supporter of Roosevelt's proposal for a UN-type organisation that would provide for the collective enforcement of a general peace by the great powers—an idea that persisted through to Vyshinskii's peace pact proposal. Another historical referent for the collective security proposal was the experience of Germany in the 1930s; included among the foreign ministry's briefing documents was a historical analysis of how Hitler had come to power through free

⁵⁴ Molotov's correspondence with Khrushchev, Malenkov and the Presidium is contained in the following file: "Zapiski v TsK KPSS: Proekty Direktiv dlya Sovetskoi Delegatsii k Berlinskomu Soveshchaniu Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav", AVPRF, f.6, o.13, p.5, d.41. The Gromyko/Pushkin drafts of 12 and 17 January may be found in "Proekty Direktiv k Berlinskomu Soveshchaniu", AVPRF f.06, o.13, p.6, d.42. Both these files are a little scrappy and confused and require some reconstruction to make sense of the sequence of events.

⁵⁵ "Anglo-Amerikanskii Plan 'Svobodnykh Vyborov v Germanii'", 12/1/54 and 18/1/54, "Gemanskii Vopros i Vopros Evropeiskoi Bezopasnosti," 16/1/54, AVPRF, f.082, o.42, p.287, d.34, l.1-40, 41-52, 57-99; "Spravka o Bonnskom i Parizhskom Dogovorakh," 16/1/54, AVPRF, f.06, o.13a, p.35, d.167, l.15-41

⁵⁶ "Vozmozhnye Argumenty Protiv Obshcheevropeishogo Dogovor o Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti v Evrope i Nashi Kontrargumenty", AVPRF o.13-g, p.65, d.25, l.1-5.

elections and unleashed a new world war.⁵⁷ In his discussions with Western diplomats Molotov often argued that free elections without guarantees concerning the future behavior of a united Germany could have similar results and consequences. In retrospect Molotov's fear of a repeat performance of the 1930s seems more hysterical than historical but it was hardly surprising just 10 years after the end of a war with Germany in which the USSR had suffered 25 million deaths.

The Berlin Conference of Foreign Ministers, 25 January–18 February 1954

The Foreign Ministers Conference was held in Berlin upon Soviet suggestion and it was agreed to rotate the sessions around the four occupied sectors of the city. The main topic of discussion was the German question and, as might be expected in such a setting, the public sessions of the conference—27 in all—were dominated by propaganda polemics. Not surprisingly, the conference ended without agreement, except for a decision to convene an international conference to discuss the war in Indochina and the situation in Korea.

Molotov was accompanied at the conference by a large delegation of deputies and expert advisors, including Gromyko, Malik (now ambassador to the UK), Pushkin and Semyonov (back in Germany as High Commissioner). “The Soviet Delegation was unquestionably their first team,” noted C. D. Jackson, Eisenhower's expert on psychological warfare, who accompanied John Foster Dulles to the conference.⁵⁸

The discussion⁵⁹ on the German question turned out to be mostly a reprise of Soviet-Western public polemics that preceded the conference, with the Western powers demanding free all-German elections as a pre-condition for the negotiation of a peace treaty while the Soviets insisted on the establishment of a provisional German

⁵⁷ “Usloviya Prikhoda k Vlasti Gitlera i Opasnost' Ustanovleniya v Germanii Fashizma Putem Ispol'zovaniya Formal'no 'Zakonnykh Parlamentskikh Vozmozhnostei'”, 5/1/54, AVPRF, f.06, o.13a, p.35, d.167, l.1-15.

⁵⁸ “Post-Berlin Thoughts on the Current Soviet Psyche”, C. D. Jackson Papers, Box 50, Eisenhower Correspondence 1954 (2), Eisenhower Library.

⁵⁹ My summaries of the conference proceedings are based on the American records in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, vol. 5, part 1, (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1983 (hereafter: FRUS 1954)) pp. 809-1205 and the Soviet records in “Stenogrammy Zasedanii Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav”, AVPRF f.6, o.13g, p.63, d.12. Another copy of the Soviet stenogs may be found in AVPRF, f.444, o.1, p.1, dd.1a, 3, 5.

government that would organize those elections. Publicly, the Western powers characterized Molotov's performance at the conference as typically dogmatic, uncompromising, and negative and many historians have been content to accept this judgement. However, a more dispassionate reading of the proceedings suggests that Molotov displayed considerable flexibility and made strenuous efforts to reach agreement. In his very first contribution to the discussion Molotov said that "we have gathered here to arrive at some compromises. We have not assembled to make categorical statements but to listen to one another with a view to reaching agreement on some questions."⁶⁰ In this spirit Molotov refuted Western claims that the provisional government proposal was aimed at delaying all-German elections and said that a short timetable of events leading to elections could be agreed. Molotov also denied that the Soviet aim was East German-style elections in which the results would be manipulated. He pointed out that post-war experience showed that sometimes communist participation in coalition governments in Europe had led to Soviet-style people's democracy but not always. Molotov even proposed a referendum in Germany on the choice between joining the EDC and the signature of a peace treaty leading to reunification. There was also a new Soviet proposal on the table: occupation forces, apart from a token presence, would be withdrawn prior to elections (i.e. the process could begin before the signature of a peace treaty). On innumerable occasions Molotov said that all Soviet proposals were up for detailed discussion and amendment. In private, Molotov was even more friendly and accommodating. At dinner with Dulles on 6 February Molotov said that "he thought there was a possibility of some success on Germany...along the lines of a small German army, with a German government which would be directed neither against the United States, France, Great Britain, nor the Soviet Union. He wondered if that possibility was totally excluded." Later in the conversation Molotov "repeated his view that a limited German army, with a government which was directed against none of the four powers, was a possible line of development." Towards the end of the conversation Molotov made the

⁶⁰ AVPRF f.6, o.13g, p.63, d.12, l.27.

same point again “but he left the impression that if this was excluded, other courses might be considered.”⁶¹

Molotov displayed similar flexibility on the question of a peace treaty with Austria. Here the Soviet proposal was that a peace treaty ending allied occupation and restoring Austrian independence could be signed on two conditions: (1) that Austria would not join any military coalition or allow the establishment of foreign military bases on its territory and (2) that the final withdrawal of occupation forces was delayed until the signature of a peace treaty with Germany – a proposal directed at precluding a new *Anschluss*. What the Soviets had in mind was the retention of a token and symbolic occupation force—a force that would not actually carry out any occupation functions. The neutralization clause demanded by Molotov was similar to that in relation to Germany and the two demands were linked by the desire to keep the two countries outwith the EDC. But when the Austrian representative indicated that while his government did not want such a clause in the peace treaty it was willing to make a public pledge to that effect, Molotov indicated that this would be good enough.

Another set of discussions at the conference centered on the Soviet proposal for a pan-European system of collective security, which was introduced by Molotov on 10 February.⁶² The Soviets had evidently been expecting the Western states to put forward their own proposals for a system of non-aggression treaties and held back on their own position until quite late in the day. The Western response to the Soviet proposal was predictably hostile, particularly when Molotov made it clear that the proposed collective security system was a direct alternative to the EDC. A particular bone of contention was that under the terms of the Soviet draft treaty, the United States would not be a member of the new collective security organisation but merely, together with Communist China, an observer. According to C. D. Jackson this was a gross tactical error by Molotov: “Then came the block buster. The U.S. was specifically excluded from the collective security pact...At that point we all laughed out loud and the Russians were taken completely by surprise at our reaction. Molotov did a double take and finally managed a

⁶¹ “Memorandum of Conversation, February 6, 1954,” Eisenhower Papers, Dulles-Herter Series, Box 2, file February 54 (1), Eisenhower Library.

⁶² “The Soviet Union and the Safeguarding of European Security”, Supplement to *New Times*, no. 8, 1954, pp. 3-8.

smile, but the Russian momentum was gone.”⁶³ The laughter is often cited in Cold War historiography but not Molotov’s subsequent statements that this clause in the Soviet draft treaty could be looked at, changed, and the U.S. accorded a different status in the collective security treaty. At the session on 10 February Molotov stated that “if the idea [of collective security] is unacceptable then our proposal will fail. If the idea is not rejected but requires another draft or corrections to our draft—that is another matter.”⁶⁴ At the session on 15 February Molotov said specifically in relation to U.S. membership of a European collective security organisation: “one can have a different formulation of this point or its exclusion altogether. In any case we are prepared to examine another proposition on this question.”⁶⁵ At the same session Molotov was conciliatory in relation to NATO, saying it was disinformation to suggest that the European collective security treaty was directed against NATO when the proposed treaty was actually directed against the EDC and German rearmament.⁶⁶ Goaded by Georges Bidault, the French Foreign Minister, and Anthony Eden, the British Foreign Secretary, Molotov returned to the NATO question at the session on 17 February:

The Soviet delegation can only repeat that the draft general agreement [on European collective security] is an alternative to the EDC. Regarding the question of its compatibility with [NATO] the Soviet delegation has already replied that we are prepared to study this question. Don’t forget that in relation to [NATO] there are different views. Eden has more than once emphasised that in his view [NATO] has a defensive character. Bidault also spoke about this. The Soviet government has a different estimation of [NATO]. That is why it is necessary to study this question. Moreover, it is not to be excluded that [NATO] could be amended and the differences about the character of the agreement eliminated. A reply to Bidault’s question about the compatibility or incompatibility of [NATO] and the general European question will only be possible after we have jointly studied this question.⁶⁷

⁶³ “Letter from C.D. Jackson dated February 10, 1954,” C.D. Jackson Papers, Box 33, file Berlin Basics (1).

⁶⁴ AVPRF f.6, o.13g, p.63, d.12, l.250.

⁶⁵ *ibid* 1.501.

⁶⁶ *ibid* 1.504.

⁶⁷ *ibid* 1.548-549.

Molotov's remarks on U.S. participation in a European collective security system and on the Soviet attitude towards NATO were fully reported in *Pravda*.⁶⁸ His statements presaged a rather radical foreign policy initiative a few weeks later: a proposal that the USSR join NATO!

Integral to the Soviet proposal on collective security was that discussions on a pan-European agreement would form part of the process leading to a peace treaty with Germany. Indeed, pan-European collective security arrangements were the essential context for the signature of a peace treaty and the formation of a united Germany. In other words, there would be no EDC, no German rearmament, and the peace would be secured by a collective guarantee against aggression. As Molotov stated in his speech introducing the collective security proposal: "The creation of a system of collective security in Europe cannot and should not detract from the importance and necessity of settling the German question as speedily as possible in accordance with the requirements of maintaining peace in Europe. More, the establishment of a system of collective security would help to create more favorable conditions for the settlement of the German question, inasmuch as it would rule out the involvement of either part of Germany in military alignments, and would thus remove one of the chief impediments to the creation of a united peaceable and democratic German state."⁶⁹

But the Western powers saw things very differently. For them the EDC was a defensive organization and was a method to contain Germany while at the same time strengthening Western defenses against the Soviet threat. Unlike Molotov, the lesson they drew from prewar history was that a punitive policy would only encourage German nationalism and that a disarmed and neutralized Germany was not sustainable in the long run. Far better, then, to tame Germany rather than encircle the country in a system of collective security, as the Soviets proposed. Hence, Western representatives at the conference gave no credence to Soviet proposals on either the German question or European collective security, viewing them as a cover for more sinister designs. In his radio and television broadcast on the conference to the American public on 24 February,

⁶⁸ The reporting of these remarks of Molotov may be found in *Pravda* under the headline "Berlinskoe Soveshchanie", 11/2/54, 16/2/54 and 18/2/54.

⁶⁹ "The Soviet Union and the Safeguarding of European Security", Supplement to *New Times*, no. 8, 1954, p. 6.

Dulles described Soviet aims as being a communist-controlled Germany and a Soviet-controlled Europe from which the U.S. would be excluded. He ridiculed Molotov's collective security proposal as "so preposterous that when he read it laughter rippled around the Western sides of the table to the dismay of the Communist delegation."⁷⁰ In his private report to the National Security Council two days later, Dulles was no less scathing, arguing that the conference showed that the neutralization of Germany and Austria was not possible because the Soviets would accept nothing less than full control of those countries. What the Soviets wanted, said Dulles, was a division of the world with the United States, under which the US would be restricted to the Western Hemisphere while the USSR dominated Eurasia.⁷¹

When he returned from Berlin, Molotov drafted instructions for Soviet press coverage of the results of the conference. While these instructions were highly critical of the Western powers, accusing them of dividing Germany and reviving German militarism, the press was also encouraged to highlight the conference's role in helping to reduce international tensions. The Soviet press, concluded the document, should be argumentative but calm when giving a decisive rebuff to bourgeois attacks on the policy of the USSR.⁷²

In early March Molotov gave a report on the conference to a plenum of the Central Committee. The report was highly critical of Western policy, but Molotov saw hope in growing popular opposition to the EDC, especially in France and West Germany. Far from abandoning the collective security proposal in the face of Western rebuff, the Soviets saw the Berlin Conference as a launching pad for their campaign on European collective security. A particular target of the campaign was France, which had yet to ratify the Paris-Bonn agreements, and where there was deep concern about the remilitarization of Germany. That said, Molotov's final assessment of the Berlin Conference was not overly positive. The agreement to hold a five-power conference on the Far East was important, said Molotov, and a meeting of the Great Powers after a five

⁷⁰ "Report on Berlin: Address by Secretary Dulles," *Department of State Bulletin*, 8 March 1954, pp. 343-344.

⁷¹ FRUS 1954 pp. 1221-1231.

⁷² "Ukazaniya dlya Sovetskoi Pechati i Radio v svyazi s Itogami Berlinskogo Soveshchaniya i Podgotovkoi k Zhenevskoi Konferentsii," AVPRF, f.6, o.13, p.6, d.45.

year gap had been useful but “the results of the Berlin conference should not, of course, be overrated.”⁷³

Molotov’s report was published in *Pravda* on 5 March, but the newspaper’s text omitted this section of Molotov’s plenum speech:

It is necessary to take special note that our government and communist party central committee attached great importance to the preparation of the Soviet delegation for the conference. As a result, as you know from our press, the Soviet delegation did not arrive at the Berlin Conference with empty hands. All the issues, all the resolutions at the Berlin Conference, were subject to several discussions in the Presidium of the central committee before the conference. The drafts of the foreign ministry were discussed in detail and improved and supplemented during the course of this discussion. Here speaks the meaning and strength of the collective leadership that has been strengthened in our central committee in the recent period. (*Prolonged applause*). We went to Berlin with a clear program and with detailed directives. Before our central committee Presidium was the fundamental task of devising measures that could help reduce tensions in international relations while at the same time further strengthening the international position of the Soviet Union. Such is the unchanging policy of the Soviet government, which is directed at the preservation of peace.⁷⁴

Perhaps Molotov was just paying obeisance to the post-Stalin mantra of the virtues of collective leadership but it is possible that he was also trying to nullify criticism of his strategy and tactics at the conference. In Berlin he had tried hard to reach agreement with the West, and may even have exceeded his conference brief. As Dulles noted after the conference: “Molotov had spoken with an evident show of personal authority. The Soviet Foreign Minister no longer appeared a mere subordinate, as he had when Stalin was alive. He appeared, comparatively at least, free to make his own decisions with a minimum of reporting back to Moscow for instructions.”⁷⁵

It was interesting, too, that when Molotov ended his report at the plenum, Malenkov intervened in the discussion to put a more positive spin on the conference outcome, saying that it had resulted in a strengthening of the Soviet Union’s international

⁷³ For an English translation of the published version of Molotov’s plenum report see “The Berlin Conference”, Supplement to *New Times*, no. 10, 1954, pp. 3-14. Drafts of Molotov’s report may be found in AVPRF, f.6, o.13, p.6, d.46.

⁷⁴ RGANI, f.2, o.1, d.77, l.28-29.

⁷⁵ FRUS 1954 p.1221.

position and had dealt a “telling blow” against plans for the EDC. Malenkov added that the plenum should “recognize that Comrade Molotov had been equal to the tasks entrusted to him, that the Soviet delegation to the Berlin Conference had risen to the occasion,” remarks that evoked “*prolonged, stormy applause.*” Malenkov then proposed, on behalf of the Presidium, a motion approving the activities of the Soviet delegation at the Berlin Conference. This little scene may not have pleased Khrushchev, who was chairing the session and said nothing except to ask for a vote on the resolution (passed unanimously) and then declared the plenum closed.⁷⁶

The Soviet delegation monitored Western press reports and commentary on its conference proposals throughout the Berlin Conference. They took particular note of the great and favourable interest in the proposal on European collective security.⁷⁷ It seems likely that this positive coverage encouraged further pursuit of this particular policy. Not long after his return to Moscow, Molotov moved to deal with the question of U.S. participation in a European collective security system and the issue of Soviet relations with NATO. Gromyko was tasked to formulate a new policy and after a number of drafts, corrected in detail by Molotov, the end result was a dual proposal: the United States could join the European collective security organization and the USSR could join NATO.⁷⁸ On 26 March Molotov sent a long note to Khrushchev and Malenkov explaining the rationale for the proposal. He began by emphasizing the positive response provoked by the Soviet proposal for European collective security, especially in France. However, opponents of the Soviet proposal were saying that it was aimed at dislodging the United States from Europe. A related argument against the Soviet proposal was that it was directed at undermining NATO. The USSR should, therefore, propose simultaneously the USA’s participation in a system of European collective security and the possibility of Soviet membership of NATO. Molotov’s assessment of the probable outcome of this dual proposal was as follows:

Most likely the organisers of the North Atlantic bloc will react negatively to this step of the Soviet government and will advance many different

⁷⁶ RGANI, f.2, o.1, d.77, l.79-80.

⁷⁷ “Obzor no.4: Otklikov Pressy Zapadnykh Derzhav o Soveshchaniï Ministrov Inostrannykh Del SSSR, Frantsii, Anglii i SShA”, AVPRF, f.082, o.42, p.287, d.35, l.34-47. This report was compiled by Gribanov.

⁷⁸ AVPRF, f.06, o.13, p.2, d.9, l.20-55.

objections. In that event the governments of the three powers will have exposed themselves once again as the organisers of a military bloc against other states and it would strengthen the position of social forces conducting a struggle against the formation of the European Defence Community. Such an attitude toward the initiative of the Soviet government could, of course, have its negative side for us in so far as it affected the prestige of the Soviet Union. Taking this into account, the Foreign Ministry proposes that the Soviet note should not state directly the readiness of the USSR to join the North Atlantic bloc but limit itself to a declaration of its readiness to examine jointly with other interested parties the question of the participation of the USSR in the North Atlantic bloc.

Of course, if the statement of the Soviet government meets with a positive attitude on the part of the three western powers this would signify a great success for the Soviet Union since the USSR joining the North Atlantic Pact under certain conditions would radically change the character of the pact. The USSR joining the North Atlantic pact simultaneously with the conclusion of a General European Agreement on Collective Security in Europe would undermine plans for the creation of the European Defence Community and the remilitarization of West Germany.

The Foreign Ministry considers that raising the question of the USSR joining NATO requires even now an examination of the consequences that might arise. Bearing in mind that the North Atlantic Pact is directed against the democratic movement in the capitalist countries, if the question of the USSR joining it became practical it would be necessary to raise the issue of all participants in the agreement undertaking a commitment (in the form of a joint declaration, for example) on the inadmissibility of interference in the internal affairs of states and respect for the principles of state independence and sovereignty.

In addition the Soviet Union would, in an appropriate form, have to raise the question of American military bases in Europe and the necessity for states to agree to the reduction of military forces, in accordance with the position that would be created after the USSR's entry into the North Atlantic Pact.⁷⁹

It evident from these remarks that while Molotov did not expect the Soviet initiative to succeed he did not rule out the possibility that it might. In that event USSR would be prepared to join NATO, if the terms were right.

⁷⁹“V Prezidium TsKPSS: Tovarishchu G.M. Malenkovu, N.S. Khrushchevu”, Ibid 1.56-59. I am grateful to Alexei Filitov for bringing the existence of this file to my attention.

These internal deliberations and the move towards a more flexible position in relation to the U.S. and NATO found public expression in the March 1954 election campaign for the Supreme Soviet. In their election speeches both Malenkov and Molotov highlighted the importance of the struggle for European collective security. Malenkov was particularly forthright:

Of late aggressive circles have been more and more openly pursuing a policy of...dividing Europe and pitting one group of European states against another. But the European peoples' growing solidarity resists this ruinous policy of division and defends peace and progress....It is not true that mankind has only two choices: fresh world carnage or the so-called Cold War. People are vitally interested in strengthening peace. The Soviet government stands for a further reduction of international tensions and a firm and lasting peace, and is resolutely opposed to the policy of Cold War, the policy of preparation for a new world war, which, with modern methods of warfare, means the ruin of world civilization....The main obstacle on the path toward lessening international tensions is the Western powers' approach to important international questions as a closed military group which places aggressive military and strategic considerations above all else. This is the only explanation of the Western powers' attitude to the proposed General European Treaty on Collective Security in Europe....We may rest assured that, given a real desire to guarantee security in Europe, it would be possible to surmount the obstacles to concluding the General European Treaty on Collective Security in Europe.

In his speech Molotov took up the criticism that the Soviet treaty proposal excluded the U.S. from the proposed collective security organization, pointing out that “during the Berlin conference no one denied the possibility of considering appropriate amendments to the draft presented.” According to Molotov “the Soviet draft general European treaty...is inconsistent with attempts to set up military groupings of European states, which are leading to a new war in Europe. This draft is a means of uniting the peoples of Europe in the interests of strengthening peace and international security.”

The emphasis in Khrushchev's election speech was a little different. While he noted that at the Berlin Conference the “Soviet Union brought forward concrete proposals for easing tensions in international relations,” he did not specify what these were. His main foreign policy theme was the growing importance of the socialist camp and he concluded with the peroration: “like a mighty giant, the Soviet state, in friendly

cooperation with the countries of people's democracy, is confidently proceeding towards its great goal, winning victory after victory. There is no force in the world which could deter our victorious advance to communism."⁸⁰

Moscow's willingness to engage in further negotiations with the West, as expressed in the Molotov and Malenkov speeches, was taken up in the Soviet press. An article in *New Times*, citing the two speeches, said the argument that "the conclusion that an all-European system of collective security is 'incompatible' with the Atlantic alliance is purely a product of Western propaganda."⁸¹

At the end of March the Soviet government issued a new note on collective security in Europe announcing two amendments to the draft treaty it had submitted to the Berlin Conference. First, the United States would not be excluded from formal participation in a system of European collective security. Second, if NATO relinquished its aggressive character, the USSR itself would consider participation in that organization. In those circumstances, concluded the note, NATO "would cease to be a closed military alignment of states and would be open to other European countries which, together with the creation of an effective system of European collective security, would be of cardinal importance for the promotion of universal peace."⁸²

On 7 May the Western states rejected the Soviet note on grounds that the USSR's participation in NATO would be incompatible with the aims of the organization.⁸³ But this was not the first time the Soviets had said that if NATO was a defensive alliance they would like to join, and nor would it be the last. At the Deputy Foreign Minister's Conference in 1951 Gromyko had said that if NATO were directed against German aggression the USSR would like to become a member—remarks that were published in

⁸⁰ Khrushchev, Malenkov and Molotov election speeches in *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. 6, no. 11 1954. Malenkov's speech is usually noted for his statement that a new world war would mean the end of human civilisation. It may be contrasted with Khrushchev's statement to the Supreme Soviet on 26 April 1954: "If the imperialists attempt to unleash a new world war it will result in the final destruction of the capitalist system" (*Pravda*, 27 April 1954). Khrushchev made a similar statement to the congress of the Czechoslovak communist party in June 1954: "If the imperialists unleash a new, third world war, they will choke on it and it will end in catastrophe for the capitalist world" (*Pravda*, 13/6/54). However, the day before Malenkov gave his speech he sent a copy to Khrushchev and asked him to "familiarize" himself with it. Khrushchev signed off on the speech and it was republished as a special pamphlet as well as in the newspapers. RGASPI, f.83, o.1, d.15, l.116, 156-163.

⁸¹ "Collective Security," *New Times*, no. 12, 1954, pp. 3-7.

⁸² "Note of the Soviet Government...31 March 1954," Supplement to *New Times*, no. 14, 3 April 1954.

⁸³ "U.S. Rejects Soviet Proposals for European Security: Text of U.S. Note," *Department of State Bulletin*, 17 May 1954, pp. 756-757.

Pravda.⁸⁴ In August 1952 Stalin himself joked with the French ambassador that if NATO were a peaceful alliance then the Soviet Union should join it.⁸⁵ Self-evidently, Stalin and Gromyko were scoring propaganda points, and the March 1954 note had that dimension as well. But it was also a serious proposition, one designed to make collective security more palatable to the West and to open up the possibility of negotiations that would lead to a pan-European détente. Indeed, the dual proposal for U.S. participation in European collective security and for Soviet participation in NATO proved to be the first of many such moves towards an accommodation with the West. This inclination to seek such a radical and wide-ranging deal with the West was, without doubt, reinforced by the highly positive impact the reformulation of the Soviet position on European collective security had on Western public opinion.⁸⁶

Alongside the continuation of the collective security campaign, the Soviets considered what to do next on the German question. Since negotiations with the West were at an impasse, Moscow's attention focused on measures to strengthen the position of the GDR. In a note to Molotov on 27 February, Pushkin and Semyonov made various proposals to enhance the status and authority of the GDR government.⁸⁷ Many of their suggestions found public expression in a Soviet statement on relations with the GDR issued on 26 March. This announced that the Soviet Union's relations with the GDR would henceforth be similar to those with other sovereign states and that the East German government would be free to determine its internal and external affairs. To this end Soviet supervision of GDR government agencies was abolished and the role of the Soviet High Commissioner in Germany—the occupying authority in East Germany—was significantly reduced.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ “Spravka ob Otnoshenii Sovetskogo Souza k Severo-Atlanticheskomy Paktu”, AVPRF, f.082, o.42, p.284, d.14, l.3-5.

⁸⁵ Cited by N. I. Yegorova, “NATO i Evropeiskaya Bezopasnost’: Vospriyatie Sovetskogo Rukovodstva” in Ilya Gaiduk, N. I. Yegorova, A.O. Chubar’yan (eds.), *Stalin i Kholodnaya Voina*, IVI/RAN: Moscow 1998, p. 310. I am grateful to Professor Yegorova for this reference.

⁸⁶ See, for example, I. Koblyakov, “Otnoshenie v Zapadnoi Germanii k Itogam Berlinskogo Soveshchaniya” (report dated 16/6/54), AVPRF, f.082, o.42, p.287, d.35, l.172-193.

⁸⁷ “O Meropriyatiyakh v Otnoshenii Germanii v Svyazi s Berlinskim Soveshchaniem”, AVPRF, f.06, o.36, Pap.36, d.169, l.1-3.

⁸⁸ “Statement of the Soviet Government on Relations Between the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republics”, *New Times*, 27 March 1954, p. 1.

Such measures expressed the tendency in Soviet policy to entrench the GDR's position as a separate German state, but the foreign ministry's other priority remained the struggle for Germany's reunification in an acceptable form. In a commentary on a March 1954 SED policy statement on "Principles for the Reunification of Germany as a Peaceful, Democratic, and Independent State" Pushkin and Semyonov said the document needed serious correction because it did not sufficiently emphasize the struggle against the Paris-Bonn accords and omitted a call for a West German government that was committed to the conclusion of peace treaty leading towards German reunification.⁸⁹ Another proposal by Semyonov and Pushkin was to hold a referendum in Germany on the question of a peace treaty versus the Paris-Bonn accords—an idea first broached by Molotov at the Berlin Conference. In June 1954 an official, government-controlled referendum was held in the GDR; not surprisingly the peace treaty proposal was recorded as receiving the overwhelming support of the East German people. An unofficial referendum in West Germany on the same issue achieved a similar result—about 90% in favor of a peace treaty—but only 500,000 people voted.⁹⁰

Another example of the foreign ministry's thinking on the German question was a memo by Gribanov to Molotov on 16 July. Gribanov argued that the Soviet Union should stick to the position on the German question set out at the Berlin Conference—a provisional all-German government, negotiation of a peace treaty, the withdrawal of occupation forces, etc.— but if there was no progress the Soviets should try to reach agreement with the West on other issues, including the temporary withdrawal of occupation forces to the borders of Germany; the organization of an all-German conference on economic and cultural links between the two German states; and the holding of all-Berlin elections.⁹¹ Nothing came of these ideas in practice but they show, as F. I. Novik notes, that "after the Berlin Conference the Soviet diplomatic department continued to seek ways to achieve agreement with the West, if not on the main problem

⁸⁹ "Zamechaniya k Dokumentu TsK SEPG 'Printsipy dlya Vossoedineniya Germanii v Mirolubivoe Demokraticeskoe Nezavismoe Gosudarstvo", AVPRF, f.06, o.13a, p.35, d.165, l.44-45. Dated 20/3/54, the document was co-authored by D. Miroshnichenko.

⁹⁰ Novik *op.cit* pp. 129-138.

⁹¹ "Germanskii Vopros," AVPRF, f.06, o.36, p.36, d.169, l.6-9.

of the unification of Germany then on other issues that would lead to rapprochement rather than to the further separation of the two German states.”⁹²

That same day Gribanov composed another document for Molotov —an analysis of the impact of Soviet proposals for European collective security on Western public opinion. Gribanov’s theme was that the Soviet proposals remained at the center of Western public attention, particularly after Moscow had issued its March note proposing Soviet admission to NATO. According to Gribanov, Soviet proposals were having considerable impact on the growing movement against the ratification of the Paris-Bonn accords, especially in France.⁹³ The prospective failure of the EDC project galvanized Moscow’s attention in summer 1954 much more than the German question because it promised an opportunity to renew the diplomatic dimension of the campaign for European collective security.

From Collective Security to the Warsaw Pact

The opening for a new Soviet initiative on collective security was provided not by the failure of the EDC, but by the success of the 1954 Geneva Conference, which had resulted in agreements ending the war in Indochina.⁹⁴ The conference ended on 21 July and the next day the Soviets issued a statement highlighting the conference’s lessons for other international negotiations:

The fact that the Geneva Conference culminated in agreement between the countries concerned provides fresh proof of the fruitfulness of international negotiations, given the good will of the parties, proof that major outstanding international issues can be settled by this method...The results of the Geneva Conference confirm the Soviet government’s conviction that there are now no disputed issues in international affairs that cannot be settled by negotiation and by agreements intended to promote international security, relaxation of international tensions, and peaceful co-existence of states irrespective of their social systems.⁹⁵

⁹² Novik *op. cit.* p. 148.

⁹³ “Sovetskie Predlozheniya ob Obespechenii Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti v Evrope i ikh Vliyanie na Politiku Zapadnykh Derzhav v Germanskom Voprose,” AVPRF, f.082, o.42, p.284, d.14, l.34-62.

⁹⁴ On the Soviet Union and the Geneva conference see I.V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954-1963*, (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2003) and M. Olsen, *Soviet-Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949-1964*, (London: Routledge, 2006).

⁹⁵ “Statement of the Soviet Government on the Geneva Conference,” *New Times*, 24 July 1952 p. 2.

On the 24 July the Soviets published a reply to the Western note of 7 May. There were two new proposals in the Soviet note. First, that the draft treaty on European collective security should be expanded to include clauses on economic as well as political co-operation. Second, that a conference should be convened to discuss the establishment of a system of collective security in Europe. The U.S., as well as all European states, would be invited to participate and communist China would be asked to send observers.⁹⁶

On 30 August the French National Assembly rejected the plan for the EDC by a large majority. In a statement published on 10 September the Soviet Union warmly welcomed “the collapse of this projected military bloc” and reiterated proposals for a European collective security system, which would facilitate the reunification of Germany as a peaceful and democratic state.⁹⁷ That same day, however, the Western states issued their reply to the 24 July Soviet note. The Western note restated demands for all-German elections and the immediate conclusion of a peace treaty with Austria, but also held out the possibility of a foreign ministers conference on European security if these matters could be resolved. By the time the Soviets issued their reply on 23 October the London–Paris agreements on the direct admission of West Germany into NATO—the alternative to the collapsed EDC project—were in the process of being concluded. Moscow responded to this development by warning that “if these decisions are carried out, it will no longer be possible to regard West Germany as a peaceable state, and this will make the reunification of Germany impossible for a long time.” The Soviet note concluded by agreeing to the idea of a foreign ministers conference provided it examined (1) all-German elections leading to Germany’s reunification as a peaceful and democratic state; (2) withdrawal of occupation forces from Germany; and (3) the convening of a pan-European conference on collective security.⁹⁸

Faced with no progress on their proposal for a conference on European collective security, the Soviets decided to press on alone. On 13 November they issued a note

⁹⁶ “Note of the Soviet Government of July 24, 1954,” Supplement to *New Times*, no. 31, 1954, pp. 4-8. On the process of drafting this note: AVPRF, f.06, o.13, p.2, d.11.

⁹⁷ “Statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR,” Supplement to *New Times*, no. 37, 1954, pp. 2-5.

⁹⁸ “Note of the Soviet Government to the Government of France, Great Britain and the USA,” *New Times*, no. 44, 1954, pp. 3-8. On drafting of this note: AVPRF, f.6, o.13, p.2, d.12.

stating that such a conference would be convened in Moscow (or Paris if the Western powers agreed to participate) on 29 November.⁹⁹ Invitations to attend were issued to the U.S. and all European states but the Western powers rejected participation on the grounds that the Soviet proposals contained nothing new on the German question or European security. The Western note counter-proposed the immediate signing of a peace treaty with Austria and clarification of the Soviet position on all-German elections prior to the convening of another foreign ministers conference. If that conference was successful there could be a wider gathering on European security.¹⁰⁰ In other words: there could be no East-West deal on collective security before the resolution of the German question.

The “Conference of European Countries on Safeguarding European Peace and Security”, attended only by the USSR and its East-bloc allies, took place in Moscow from 29 November to 2 December 1954. It featured all the by now familiar Soviet arguments against the EDC, NATO, and West German rearmament. But there was an important new theme, stated by Molotov in his speech to the conference: “the peaceable states cannot ignore the fact that the aggressive element in some of the Western countries are seeking to prevent the establishment of a system of collective European security. They are now redoubling their efforts to create military alignments which constitute a danger to peace... We cannot, therefore, ignore or underestimate, the fact that ratification of the Paris agreements would necessitate further weighty measures with a view to providing proper defence for the peace-loving states.” This point was reiterated in the communiqué issued at the end of the conference: “if these military alliances in Europe should enlarge their land, air and other forces... the other European states will inevitably be compelled to take effective measures for their self-defense, to guard themselves against attack.”¹⁰¹

Immediately after the conference the foreign ministry began work on a new set of policies on the German question and on European security. Indeed, on the day the conference ended Semyonov submitted to Molotov a series of proposals on “further measures of the USSR in connection with the ratification of the Paris agreements.”

⁹⁹ “Note of the Soviet Government to the Governments of Europe and the USA,” *New Times*, no. 46, 1954, pp. 2-4.

¹⁰⁰ AVPRF, f.69, o.46, p.155, d.15, l.64-68.

¹⁰¹ “Conference of European Countries on Safeguarding European Peace and Security, Moscow, November 29–December 2, 1954,” *New Times*, no. 49, 4 December 1954, pp. 15, 69. The Soviet archival record of the proceedings may be found in AVPRF, f.446, o.1, p.1, d.1 but the file only contains what was published in the press.

Semyonov's main proposal was the convening of a second conference of people's democracies on European security with a view to concluding an agreement on collective defense, including the establishment of a joint military command. A related proposal was the signature of a mutual defense treaty between the GDR and the USSR and between East Germany and the other people's democracies.¹⁰²

Throughout December and January the foreign ministry worked on these proposals.¹⁰³ On 25 February Molotov sent the draft to the Presidium, together with a note suggesting the convening of a second Soviet–East European conference on European collective security. Among the proposals in the foreign ministry draft was a treaty clause establishing a joint military command—a provision worked on further by Molotov and Georgii Zhukov, the defense minister, in March–April 1955.¹⁰⁴ While East Germany was to be a treaty signatory, the question of its participation in the joint military command was put to one side for the moment and in a note to the Presidium on 9 May Molotov said that it would be expedient for the GDR government to state that a future, united German state would not be bound by the multilateral mutual assistance pact.¹⁰⁵

Moscow publicly signaled its intentions in a 15 January 1955 statement on the German question that warned “if the Paris agreements are ratified a new situation will have arisen, in which the Soviet Union will take measures not only to strengthen its friendly relations with the German Democratic Republic, but also, by the joint efforts of the peaceable European states, to strengthen the peace and security of Europe.”¹⁰⁶ In a speech to the Supreme Soviet on 8 February, Molotov further spelled this out: “the Soviet Union and other peaceable states against whom the Paris agreements are directed will not sit with folded arms. They will have to adopt appropriate measures for the more effective safeguarding of their security and protection of peace in Europe...Primarily these measures include...a treaty of friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance...so as to lose no time, consultations on this point are already in progress. To the new military

¹⁰² “Predlozheniya: O Dal’neishikh Meropriyatiya SSSR svyazannykh s Ratifikatsiyey Parizhskikh Soglashenii,” AVPRF f.6, o.13a p.27, d.27, l.2-4.

¹⁰³ The various policy drafts may be found in the file cited in *ibid* and in AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.13, d.183.

¹⁰⁴ AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.4, d.54, l.38-39, 68-64.

¹⁰⁵ I have profited from the reconstruction of the drafting process in Bystrova *op. cit.* pp. 471-477. The get-out clause for a future united Germany was suggested to Molotov by the GDR leadership: AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.4, d.54, l.99-100.

¹⁰⁶ “Statement of the Soviet Government on the German Question,” *New Times*, no. 4, 1955, p. 5.

blocs and alliances being formed in conjunction with German militarism, we shall retaliate by further cementing our ranks, strengthening our ties of friendship, improving our cooperation generally and, wherever necessary, by extending the scope of our mutual assistance.”¹⁰⁷

The second “Conference of European Countries on Safeguarding European Peace and Security” was held in Warsaw on 11–14 May 1955. It concluded with the signature of a multilateral “Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance.” The rationale for the treaty was the Bonn parliament’s ratification of the Paris–London agreements on West Germany’s admission to NATO. Even so, the door to a negotiated settlement to the German question was not shut, nor was the project of European collective security abandoned. The main speech at the conference was by Bulganin who had replaced Malenkov as prime minister in February 1955. Malenkov was dismissed at Khrushchev’s behest because of differences over economic policy but Khrushchev also took the opportunity to reprise some of the themes of his speech to the Beria plenum. In an unpublished speech to the party group of the Supreme Soviet in February 1955 Khrushchev said: “To abandon socialism in the GDR, this means to abandon East Germany, to unite [and] send it to the West. Some people have said that there will be a unified German state, a neutral country between the Soviet Union and the bourgeois capitalist world....will Germany be a neutral country in our current conditions? This is impossible. Either it ought to go with us or go against us...it would have been naïve to think that we, for example, would give up East Germany and we would right away have friendly relations with the British and Americans. Is this possible? No, this is impossible. You just give the enemy a finger and he will grab your hand. You give him Eastern Germany and he will say: get out of Poland and Czechoslovakia.”¹⁰⁸ Molotov went along with the criticism of Malenkov’s policy on the German question but Khrushchev’s attack on Malenkov applied with equal force to his own position. At this stage, however, Khrushchev had still not established his dominance of foreign policy and when Bulganin spoke at the Warsaw conference he echoed the established line in support of the reunification of Germany. He said that the Soviet Union was “prepared to lend its utmost

¹⁰⁷ V.M. Molotov, “The International Situation and the Foreign Policy of the Soviet Government,” *New Times*, no. 7, 1955, p. 21.

¹⁰⁸ The text of Khrushchev’s speech may be found on the CWIHP website.

assistance to the restoration of German unity and to the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany on an acceptable basis.” He also reiterated Soviet proposals for a withdrawal of occupation forces from Germany, noting that “the Soviet government continues to hold the opinion that...the best way of safeguarding peace and preventing new aggression...is to organize a system of collective security with the participation of all European states, irrespective of their social systems...Ratification of the Paris agreements has made the solution to this problem more difficult, but has not removed it from the order of the day.”¹⁰⁹

The Warsaw Pact has often been characterised as a military counter to NATO – which is what the organisation became - but its inspiration was the campaign for European collective security and its initial purpose was political: to act as an exemplar of a pan-European collective security treaty. As the final article of the Warsaw Pact announced: “should a system of collective security be established in Europe...the present treaty shall cease to be operative from the day the General European Treaty enters into force.”

Notwithstanding the setback of the FRG’s entry into NATO, Moscow remained upbeat about the campaign for European collective security, not least because there were some positive straws in the wind, notably the imminent signature of a treaty on Austria.

The logjam in Soviet-Western negotiations about a treaty ending allied occupation of Austria was broken by Molotov in his February 1955 speech to the Supreme Soviet. At the Berlin Conference a year earlier Molotov had specified two conditions for an Austrian treaty: a guarantee of the country’s neutrality and the retention of a token Soviet occupation force until a peace treaty with Germany was signed. Molotov modified this position in his Supreme Soviet speech, saying that if there were guarantees against a new *Anschluss*, then all troops could be withdrawn prior to the signature of a peace treaty with Germany. But Molotov also called for a Soviet-Western conference that would examine both the Austrian and German questions, thus maintaining the link between the two

¹⁰⁹ For the Bulganin speech and the other documentation see “Conference of European Countries on Safeguarding European Peace and Security, Warsaw, 11–14 May 1955,” *New Times*, no. 21, 21 May 1955, pp. 5-70. The Soviet archive record of the proceedings may be found in AVPRF, f.06, o.14g, p.69, d.1 but the file only contains what was published in the press.

projected treaties.¹¹⁰ A few days later, however, Norbert Bischoff, the Austrian ambassador in Moscow, suggested to Semyonov that bilateral negotiations with the Soviets about a treaty were possible.¹¹¹ Molotov was instructed by the Presidium to pursue this possibility and on 25 February he called in Bischoff and pointed out to him that his statement to the Supreme Soviet was a new position that was open to further negotiation.¹¹² More diplomatic conversations followed, paving the way for an Austrian government delegation headed by Chancellor Julius Raab to visit Moscow in mid-April. Raab's visit produced a joint communiqué in which the Austrians promised permanent neutrality and the Soviets agreed to withdraw their forces by the end of 1955—if the text of a treaty could be agreed upon by the four occupying powers.¹¹³ The communiqué was followed by four-power negotiations in Vienna and, on 15 May, by the signature in the Austrian capital of the treaty itself. In his speech at the signing ceremony Molotov said that “the conclusion of the Austrian Treaty will be conducive to relaxation of international tension and therein lies its special significance.”¹¹⁴

It is commonly asserted that Molotov opposed the compromise on the timing of Soviet troop withdrawals which made the Austrian State Treaty possible, and that his hand was forced by others in the Soviet leadership who favored an initiative to improve the prospects for an East-West détente. The origins of this story can be traced to the July 1955 Central Committee plenum.¹¹⁵ This plenum featured an extensive discussion of Soviet-Yugoslav relations centered on Molotov's opposition to the re-establishment of party-to-party relations with the Yugoslavian communists. Molotov was not opposed to a political-diplomatic rapprochement with Yugoslavia, but he did not agree with a complete repudiation of the former Soviet critique of Tito as a renegade from Marxism-Leninism (a critique which Molotov, together with Stalin, had formulated and articulated). Molotov was criticized at the plenum for his oppositional stance in

¹¹⁰ *New Times*, no. 7, 1955, p. 23.

¹¹¹ Filitov, “The Post-Stalin Succession Struggle” *op. cit.* p. 140.

¹¹² R. Steininger, “1955: The Austrian State Treaty and the German Question,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, vol. 3, no. 3, 1992, p. 500.

¹¹³ “Soviet-Austrian Communiqué,” *New Times*, no. 17, 1955, p. 2.

¹¹⁴ “Statement by V.M. Molotov at the Signing of the Austrian State Treaty, May 15, 1955,” *New Times*, no. 22, 1955, p. 4.

¹¹⁵ “Plenum TsK KPSS, Iul’ 1955 goda: Stenographicheskii Otchet: Vypusk Vtoroi”, RGANI, f.2, o.1, d.143. The discussion on the Austrian question may be found on: 1.151, 161-162, 167, 175, 180-181, 196, 199-200.

Presidium discussions during the previous few months,¹¹⁶ a critique incorporated into the formal resolution passed by the Central Committee. Khrushchev concentrated on Yugoslavia in his opening speech at the plenum and did not mention the Austrian question, but the first speaker after Molotov's initial reply to Khrushchev was Bulganin, who broadened the attack on Molotov to include other foreign policy errors, such as that in relation to Austria. Bulganin's remarks were taken up by Anastas Mikoyan, the trade minister, who expounded a detailed account of Molotov's resistance to a change of policy on Austria. A number of other speakers also mentioned Molotov's mistaken position on the Austrian question. In his concluding speech Khrushchev devoted quite a long section to the Austrian question, the theme being that Molotov obstructed the conclusion of a treaty and was intent on keeping Soviet troops in Austria for no good reason.

Molotov's reaction to this attack was contrite but defiant. In his initial response to Khrushchev he defended the former policy on Yugoslavia as a legitimate critique of Tito's nationalist deviations and pointed out that in the recent past Belgrade had adopted foreign policy positions quite different from those of the USSR. Molotov retreated somewhat in his concluding remarks at the end of the discussion, confessing to the sin of opposition in relation to the Yugoslav question and pledging his eternal loyalty to the party and its leadership, but he made no protracted confession. On the Austrian question he had this to say:

I must say comrades that I never had any doubt that this question had to be resolved. Its possible that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tarried for a few months and that in our haste to find fault we were slow to change our position on this question. We objected, demonstrating that we were working normally, etc. Of course, on our part there was tardiness and we didn't change enough...if on my part there were objections to particular points, for example, in relation to timing, these were not substantial objections...It was recalled here that in the original draft we proposed to retain the right of the Soviet Union to reintroduce troops in Austria in the event of complications in connection with the militarization of West Germany. Actually, we put forward this proposal but did not insist upon it and it would have been mistaken had we done so. The rest of the differences on this issue I have not retained in my memory since they did

¹¹⁶ Molotov's opposition within the Presidium on the Yugoslav question is documented in A. A. Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954-1964: Chernovyye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii Stenogrammy*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004) pp. 41-54.

not have any fundamental importance. True, not all our proposals were correct and the Presidium of the Central Committee corrected us, on the Austrian question and on other questions, demanding of us clearer, corrected drafts, than those we brought forward. But this happens in practical work.¹¹⁷

Molotov's version of events is supported by the files in the foreign ministry archives. The proposal to separate the issue of Soviet troop withdrawals from Austria from the question of a peace treaty for Germany was first formulated by Gromyko and other other officials in January 1955. It was their reformulation of the Soviet position that informed Molotov's Supreme Soviet speech in February. These reconsiderations continued through March and interacted with the diplomatic developments described above.¹¹⁸ Presidium discussions no doubt played a part in this process of policy shift and it seems likely that Molotov was keener than the rest of the leadership on retaining a link with the conclusion of a German peace treaty. But the changes in the Soviet position on the Austrian peace treaty should not be exaggerated. The issue was whether or not to keep a token occupation force in Austria until a German peace treaty was signed. The previous position made sense as a bargaining chip in expected discussions with the Western powers about a German peace treaty . But by early 1955 it seemed less and less likely there would be any such discussions. In that new context the tactical advantage shifted toward signing a treaty with Austria that would be an exemplar for an eventual settlement on Germany. Post-hoc polemics apart, there is no evidence that Molotov had any difficulty in accepting the new policy. If there were doves and hawks in the Soviet Presidium in 1955—and things were much more complex than that—then Molotov was in the former camp and Khrushchev was the hardliner. As Khrushchev made clear, particularly in his closing remarks at the July plenum, what drove his determination to mend bridges with Tito was not some airy-fairy notion of détente with the West, but his concept of the importance of strengthening the fraternal friendship of the socialist camp:

After the Second World War states with a combined population of 900 million split from the imperialist camp. Popular revolution triumphed in

¹¹⁷ *ibid.* 1.196.

¹¹⁸ The documents made be found in a file entitled "Ob Avstriiskom Gosudarstvennom Dogovore", AVPRF f.06, o.14, p.9, d.116. See also: Filitov, "The Post-Stalin Succession Struggle" *op. cit.* pp. 138-143.

great countries such as China. These countries coordinate their actions...The Soviet Union, the People's Republic of China, and the other countries of people's democracy must proceed from the common interests of the working class and all toilers, from the interests of the struggle for the victory of communism. Therefore we must take care to take advantage of all material and spiritual possibilities for the strengthening of our socialist camp...Understand that the socialist countries are obliged to help one another so as to strengthen the friendship between us...The historical experience of the Soviet Union underlines the teaching of Lenin that different countries, united in their safeguarding of the victory of socialism, can choose different forms and methods of resolving the concrete problems of socialist construction, depending on their historical and national peculiarities.¹¹⁹

It was this sense of priorities that led Khrushchev to prefer the reality of a socialist GDR and a divided Germany to the political risks of a negotiated settlement of the German question. Molotov and the foreign ministry, however, continued to strive for constructive negotiations with the West that would establish a pan-European collective security system and neutralize the threat of a united Germany.

The Two Genevas

The final phase of the Soviet campaign for European collective security spanned the Geneva Summit (18-23 July 1955) and the Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference (26 October-16 November 1955). The policy on European collective security that was put forward by the Soviet Union at these two meetings was similar to that presented at the Berlin Conference the year before but with some important additions and amendments, policy inflections designed to constrain the polarizing impact of NATO expansion, on the one hand, and the establishment of the Warsaw Pact, on the other hand.

The invitation to a summit discussing world problems was issued by the Western states on 10 May and the Soviets accepted on 24 May. Intersecting with this development was a reformulation of Moscow's German policy. On 27 May Pushkin sent Molotov a note entitled "On the Question of a New Soviet Proposal in Relation to the Unification of Germany." Pushkin's starting point was the new situation created by West Germany's

¹¹⁹ Plenum transcript *op. cit.* 1.141.

accession to NATO. Since it was unlikely that West Germany would or could be forced to leave NATO in the short-term, a new approach to German unification was required. At the center of Pushkin's proposed policy perspective was the idea of a process of rapprochement between the GDR and the FRG, with German unification being achieved gradually.¹²⁰ This concept of a long transition to German unity had two implications. First, it underlined the need for a common collective security system to provide essential context for the constructive coexistence of the two German states. Second, if the GDR was to coexist and seek rapprochement with West Germany, then so too should the Soviet Union. The Soviets had, in fact, stated their willingness to normalize relations with the FRG in a statement on the German question in January 1955, and had issued a decree at the end of that month declaring the state of war with Germany formally terminated. This latter declaration was aimed at facilitating the signature of a Soviet-GDR treaty but it also opened the door to the normalization of diplomatic relations with the Bonn government. On 8 June 1955 the Soviets published a statement proposing the establishment of direct political, trade, and cultural relations with the FRG and inviting Konrad Adenauer, the West German Chancellor, to Moscow for talks. The West Germans responded positively to this overture, but suggested unofficial negotiations to clarify a number of issues before entering into formal discussions. Continuing contacts eventually led to Adenauer going to Moscow in September 1955 to establish diplomatic relations between the USSR and the FRG.¹²¹ Balancing this development was the signature on 20 September of a "Treaty on Relations" between the GDR and the USSR in which the two states pledged friendship, cooperation, and continuing efforts to achieve "the reunification of Germany on a peaceful and democratic basis." Simultaneously, the Soviets announced the abolition of their High Commission in Germany and the transfer of control of all GDR borders with West Germany to the East Germans, (including those in Berlin).¹²²

¹²⁰ The document is detailed in Novik *op. cit* pp. 171-172.

¹²¹ The relevant documentation may be found in *Ustanovlenie Diplomaticheskikh Otnoshenii Mezhdru SSSR i FRG: Sbornik Dokumentov i Materialov*, (Moscow: MGIMO, 2005). See also A. Filitov, "Adenauers Moskaubesuch 1955: Vor-und Nachspiel im Spiegel der internen sowjetischen Berichte", *Rhondorfer Gesprache*, no.22.

¹²² For the text of the treaty and the other announcements see *New Times*, no. 39, 1955, pp. 8-12. On the process leading to a more limited treaty than the one originally envisaged by the foreign ministry see Novik *op.cit* pp. 156-169.

The concept of a staged approach to the achievement of goals also featured centrally in the reformulation of Soviet policy on European collective security. The directive for the Soviet delegation to the Geneva summit¹²³ defined the USSR's overriding aim as the reduction of international tensions and the development of trust between states. In relation to collective security, Western objections to previous Soviet proposals were to be dealt with by the introduction of new arrangements in two stages: during the first stage (2-3 years) the agreements and structures underpinning NATO and the Warsaw Pact would remain in force, except that the two sides would pledge non-aggression and political cooperation; only in the second stage would existing institutions be replaced by a new system of pan-European collective security. In relation to the German question, the Soviet delegation was instructed not to raise the matter on its own initiative and to resist any linking of German unification to the discussion on collective security. This seems a curious position for the Soviets to adopt given their past protestations of the inextricable links between European security and the resolution of the German question. But what the Soviets wanted to avoid was yet another argument with the West about all-German elections, which would distract from their priority of discussing European security issues. All-German elections were off the Soviet agenda—at least for the immediate future. Such elections might well lead to an all-German government intent on keeping a united Germany in NATO, which would be completely unacceptable to Moscow.

Arms control and nuclear disarmament were other policy priorities at Geneva. On 10 May 1955 the Soviet Union published proposals calling on the United Nations to establish an international control agency that would supervise dramatic reductions in armaments and armed forces and initiate a process leading to the prohibition of nuclear weapons.¹²⁴ The Soviet delegation was instructed to pursue these proposals and to press the Western states for an agreement.

The Soviet delegation to the Geneva Summit (18–23 July) was led by Bulganin, who was accompanied by Khrushchev, Molotov, and Zhukov. In his opening speech

¹²³ “Direktivny dlya Delegatsii SSSR na Soveshchani Glav Pravitel'stv Chetyrekh Derzhav v Zheneve,” AVPRF f.06, o.14, p.3, d.43, l.120-156

¹²⁴ “Proposal of the Soviet Government on the Reduction of Armaments, Prohibition of Atomic Weapons, and Elimination of the Threat of Another War,” *New Times*, no. 20, pp. 2-6.

Bulganin echoed Molotov's opening remarks at the Berlin Conference: the purpose of the conference was "not to level accusations against each other, but to explore ways and means of easing international tensions and creating an atmosphere of confidence in relations between states." Later in his presentation Bulganin outlined the new Soviet proposal for a staged approach to European security. In relation to the German question Bulganin argued that European collective security was the key to its resolution. It was a point he returned to in his closing speech at the summit. The emergence of two separate German states and their respective membership in NATO and the Warsaw Pact meant that there could be no "mechanical merging" of the two parts of Germany. What was required, said Bulganin, was the creation of internal and external conditions conducive to German unity. The external condition was European collective security, while internally what was needed was a rapprochement of the two German states.¹²⁵

While Bulganin conversed with Eisenhower, Eden (now British Prime Minister), and Edgar Faure (the French Prime Minister), Molotov was involved in parallel foreign ministers discussions with Dulles, Antoine Pinay, and Harold Macmillan. These discussions centered on what should be discussed, both at the summit itself and at a future foreign ministers conference. Predictably, the Western representatives wanted to discuss Germany and the question of all-German elections. Molotov, sticking to his brief, insisted that European security should be discussed first and kept separate from the German question. This prolonged wrangle was resolved by a decision to discuss European security *and* the German question as the first item on the agenda of a future foreign minister conference, leaving ambiguous whether the two issues would be considered together or separately.¹²⁶

Notwithstanding all the talk about the 'spirit of Geneva' the only concrete result of the summit was an agreement to hold a foreign ministers conference at the same venue in October to discuss European security, the German question, disarmament, and the development of East-West contacts. The atmosphere at the summit was good, however,

¹²⁵ Bulganin's opening and closing speeches: *New Times*, no. 30, 1955, pp. 15-19 and no. 31, pp. 20-23.

¹²⁶ The Soviet records of the foreign ministers' discussions at Geneva may be found in "Stenogrammy Zasedanii Ministrov Inostrannykh Del na Soveshchanii Glav Pravitel'stv Chetyrekh Derzhav v Zheneve," AVPRF, f.448, o.1, p.3, d.8.

especially in private sessions and meetings.¹²⁷ There was also some movement on the question of European security. In his opening speech, Eden offered the Soviet Union a security pact, an agreement on the level of forces and armaments in and around Germany, and discussions about the creation of an East-West demilitarized zone in central Europe. Faure talked about the establishment of a general security organization in Europe in return for Soviet acceptance of a unified Germany. Eisenhower was less forthcoming at the summit itself, but he had raised the idea of a neutral belt in central Europe in a speech in May.¹²⁸ At the summit Bulganin brushed aside these overtures, saying that the USSR had no need for Western security guarantees, but these Western statements did provide important clues and openings for a reformulation of Soviet policy on European collective security. Most importantly, the directive from the heads of government to the foreign ministers included instructions to consider a European security pact at their forthcoming conference.¹²⁹

By the time of the Geneva Summit Khrushchev had established his supremacy in the Soviet leadership, including in the field of foreign policy. The dispute over Yugoslavia had been a severe blow to Molotov's prestige and position in the leadership, and impacted negatively on his ability to retain initiative and control over foreign policy. A telling example of the new power relationship between Khrushchev and Molotov occurred a few days before the Geneva Summit, during a Presidium discussion of a draft foreign ministry statement on the German question. The statement had been drafted in response to Western claims that the Soviet Union had lost interest in a united Germany. The draft refuted this suggestion and reiterated Soviet support for German unity, but argued this could only be achieved in the context of European collective security and gradual rapprochement of the GDR and the FRG. There was nothing exceptional about

¹²⁷ The Soviet record of the private exchanges between the four heads of government may be found in "Zhenevskoe Soveshchanie Glav Pravitel'stv 1955g: Stenogrammy Zasedanii Glav Pravitel'stv Chetyrekh Derzhav," AVPRF, f.445, o.1, p.1, d.1, l.74-76, 92-97, 106-113, 156-169. The American record of the summit is published in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957*, vol. 5, (Washington, DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1988).

¹²⁸ See S. Dockrill, "The Eden Plan and European Security" in G. Bischof & S. Dockrill (eds.), *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000). This volume is an outstanding collection of essays that provide much evidence of the fluidity in Soviet-Western relations at the time of the Geneva summit and the possibilities of the 'respite' becoming a permanent détente.

¹²⁹ "Directive of the Heads of Government of the Four Powers to the Foreign Ministers, Geneva, July 23, 1955," *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1955-1957 op. cit.*, pp. 527-528.

the statement—its language and tone were normal in Soviet terms and its policy content in line with the current evolution of Moscow’s position on the German question and European security. But the draft was rejected by Khrushchev as being too “pugnacious” and “blunt” (sic!) while according to Bulganin the statement was “dry,” its tone “impatient,” and its conclusions inconsistent with its text. The draft was “returned” to the foreign ministry, never to see the light of day again.¹³⁰ Around the same time Molotov was given another rap over the knuckles when a foreign ministry draft of a TASS statement on the German question was extensively amended by the Presidium prior to its publication. The Presidium amendments devalued the issue of all-German elections and emphasized the necessity of a gradual and staged approach to German reunification.¹³¹

Khrushchev was a lively and powerful presence at Geneva but he did not deviate from agreed policy. Neither did Bulganin, who delivered the prearranged text of speeches drafted in conjunction with Molotov and the foreign ministry.¹³² On their way back from Geneva, however, Bulganin and Khrushchev stopped off in Berlin for talks with the GDR leadership. The conclusion of their visit on 27 July occasioned a joint communiqué in which “both sides affirmed their steadfast desire to reunify Germany on peace-loving and democratic principles...in view of the situation in Europe, the only way to unify Germany is through the joint efforts of the four powers, plus the German people, directed towards easing tensions in Europe and establishing confidence among states. This can best be done by setting up a collective security system in Europe including at first both parts of Germany, with equal rights, and later, a unified Germany. This way of settling the German question takes into account actual conditions in the two German states—the German Democratic Republic and the German Federal Republic—which have different economic and social systems. Both sides consider it impermissible that the German question should become an obstacle to ensuring European security. The German Democratic Republic and the German Federal Republic must contribute to European

¹³⁰ Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954-1964: Chernovye Protokol'nye Zapisi Zasedanii Stenogrammy op. cit* p. 14. The text of the draft statement may be found in A. A. Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954-1964: Postanovleniya, 1954-1958*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), pp. 97-100.

¹³¹ For the text of the draft statement, together with the Presidium amendments: Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954-1964: Postanovleniya op. cit* pp. 93-97. The TASS statement was published in *Pravda* on 13 July 1955 under the headline “Zayavlenie TASS po Germanskomu Voprosy.”

¹³² For the draft of Bulganin’s opening speech at the summit and Molotov’s corrections of it: AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.3, d.43, l.101-121, 156-157.

security and thus help settle the question of German unification.”¹³³ This statement was in line with the position on European security and the German question expounded by the Soviets in Geneva. However, Khrushchev also gave a speech in Berlin, reportedly to a mass meeting of 250,000 people, in which he signaled a significant hardening of the Soviet position on the German question:

The German question cannot be resolved at the expense of the GDR (*prolonged applause*). We are confident that the working people of the GDR will not agree with a point of view that only takes into account the interests of the Western countries, to the detriment of the interests of the GDR. Could the GDR agree to its incorporation into the North Atlantic pact and the West European union and its involvement in the burden of an arms race? Could the working people of the GDR accept the liquidation of all their social and political achievements, the liquidation of their democratic reforms? We are convinced that the working people of the GDR will not agree to go down such a path (*prolonged applause*).¹³⁴

Khrushchev’s statement may be compared to an answer Molotov gave to a question at a press conference in San Francisco in June 1955. Molotov was in San Francisco to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the founding of the UN and he was asked whether the Soviet aim was a united Germany with the same social system as in the GDR. He replied: “In a united Germany the regime which exists in Eastern Germany should not prevail and neither should the regime that exists in West Germany. Which regime should and will prevail in a united Germany is a matter that must be decided by the German people themselves in free all-German elections.”¹³⁵ It was Khrushchev’s view that prevailed in Moscow, however, and when, on 4 August, Bulganin reported to the Supreme Soviet on the Geneva summit he said: “nor must it be forgotten that both these states have differing social and economic structures. In the German Democratic Republic, the workers and their allies...are in power, having adopted the path of socialist construction, fully convinced of the correctness of the path they have chosen. It is quite understandable that the people of the German Democratic Republic declare that they cannot endanger the

¹³³ *The Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, vol. 7, no. 30, 1955, pp. 14-15.

¹³⁴ “Miting v Berline po Sluchau Prebyvaniya v Germanskoi Demokraticheskoi Respublike Sovetskoi Pravitel’svennoi Delegatsii: Rech’ Tovarishcha N.S. Khrushcheva,” *Pravda*, 27 July 1955.

¹³⁵ “Press-Konfrentsiya u V.M. Molotova v San-Frantsisko”, *Pravda*, 27/6/55.

achievements they have gained during this period.”¹³⁶ Such sentiments were also evident in a foreign ministry draft of a message to the governments of the people’s democracies on the results of Geneva, which stated that the resolution of the German question would not be at the expense of the GDR’s socialist achievements and that a rapprochement between two German states would take ten years. The document also made it clear that there was no question of accepting a united Germany integrated into NATO in exchange for Western guarantees of Soviet security.¹³⁷ On that basis there was little hope of achieving European collective security since it was self-evident that, at a minimum, the West would require some kind of compromise on the German question if it were to accept such an arrangement. The dilemma for Molotov and his foreign ministry officials as they prepared for the Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference was how to maintain negotiations with the West on collective security whilst at the same time responding to pressures from the Khrushchev camp to support further integration of the GDR into the socialist bloc.

The foreign ministry’s response to this challenge was yet another policy innovation: the proposal that East and West Germany should form a German confederation aimed at facilitating rapprochement between the two states and preparing the ground for future reunification. Presenting this proposal to Molotov on behalf of the drafting group (which included Gromyko and Pushkin) on 8 October, Semyonov said that:

In our view the question of forming a German confederation is the principal new issue and it would be advisable to have an exchange of views with the leading comrades before introducing a draft to the Presidium. For our part, we think that since the GDR and the FRG would retain their full sovereignty in a German confederation, such a proposal meets the task of strengthening the GDR as a sovereign state as well as the task of keeping the banner of a united Germany in our hands.¹³⁸

In a separate document the foreign ministry officials outlined this German confederation: it would be formed on terms to be agreed between the GDR and the FRG; there would be

¹³⁶ *New Times*, no. 33, 1955, p. 14.

¹³⁷ “Proekt Informatsii Poslov Stran Narodnoi Demokratii ob Itogakh Zhenevskogo Soveshchaniya Glav Pravitel’stv Chetyrekh Derzhav,” AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.3, d.44, l.29-47.

¹³⁸ AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.3, d.46, l.1.

an elected consultative assembly and all-German bodies to coordinate policy; it would facilitate the cooperation of the two German states and the negotiation of an agreement leading to the reunification of Germany as a democratic and peace-loving state, including the holding of all-German elections.¹³⁹ Semyonov also suggested consultations with the GDR leadership about this proposal and a telegram to the Soviet ambassador in Berlin was drafted suggesting an unofficial visit to Moscow by an East German delegation.¹⁴⁰

It is not clear what consultations took place but the final draft of the delegation's instructions incorporated a notable change: the paragraph proposing a German confederation was omitted and in its place was substituted the following:

In the examination of the German question at the conference the delegation must proceed from the fact that in present conditions the fundamental task in relation to the German question is the consolidation of the social system forming in the GDR, as well as strengthening the foreign policy position of the GDR as a sovereign state. In this connection it is necessary to rebuff all attempts by the three Western powers to resolve the German question at the expense of the GDR and its social achievements.¹⁴¹

As this directive shows, the tendency towards a two Germanies policy in which the priority was strengthening the GDR as a member of the socialist camp had solidified into a definite policy stance. However, Molotov had not yet given up on a negotiated resolution of the German question linked to a deal on European collective security. During the course of the Geneva Foreign Ministers conference he was to make one last effort to persuade the Soviet leadership to adopt a more conciliatory approach to negotiations with the Western powers.

Another element of the foreign ministry's preparations for the Geneva conference was more successful: the further refinement of the staged approach to the achievement of European collective security. While the original Soviet proposal on pan-European collective security was to be reintroduced at the conference, if the West rejected an all-embracing pact Molotov would then propose a security treaty embracing a smaller group of countries, perhaps only the four great powers and the two Germanies. Under this

¹³⁹ "O Sozdanii Germanskoi Konfederatsii," AVPRF f.06, o.14, p.3, d.46, l.28-29.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.* l.31

¹⁴¹ *ibid.* l.82.

proposal there would be no time limit on the liquidation of existing groupings such as NATO and the Warsaw Pact. If this proposal was rejected, the Soviets would next propose a four-power non-aggression treaty and if that was unacceptable, there could be a simple non-aggression agreement between NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets were also prepared to contemplate the establishment of a controlled military zone in Central Europe, including both parts of Germany, in which armed forces would be limited in size and subject to inspection. The Soviet delegation was also instructed to push ahead with previous proposals on arms control and nuclear disarmament.¹⁴²

In arriving at this more flexible position on European security the Soviets had, in fact, placed themselves on a path of convergence with the Western powers who were preparing proposals that went beyond their previous offer of a security guarantee. For once Soviet propaganda and campaigning had been successful, and the pressure of public opinion was bearing down on Western governments, particularly the growing popularity of the idea of pan-European collective security. An American analysis of public opinion polling, data prepared for the Eisenhower administration soon after the Geneva Summit, concluded that the results “raise disquieting doubts about the future of NATO.” The most telling data concerned the question: “suppose it were proposed that NATO be replaced by a security system including both the U.S. and the USSR and other European nations. Would you favor this proposal, or do you prefer present arrangements for West European defense?” In response 38% of respondents in Britain, France, Italy, and West Germany said they would favor a new system while only 19% would favor retaining NATO, with 43% having no opinion. Numbers favoring mutual troop withdrawals by the United States and the Soviet Union from Europe were even higher. Among “upper socio-economic groups” the percentages favouring pan-European security and troop withdrawals were higher still. “NATO, in fact, appears highly vulnerable from the opinion point of view,” concluded the analysis. “At the least, it appears the people of

¹⁴² “Direktiviy Dlya Delegatsii SSSR na Soveshchaniy Ministrov Inostrannykh Del Chetyrekh Derzhav v Zheneve,” *ibid.*, 1.73-108. This is the final draft of the instructions, which were forwarded by Molotov to the Presidium on 15 October.

Western Europe are now willing to consider security arrangements alternative to NATO.”¹⁴³

In response to these and other political pressures the Western powers decided to propose a European security treaty under which the signatories would renounce the use of force, limit armaments and armed forces, and pledge to act collectively against aggression, irrespective of whether the attackers or the victims were NATO members. This proposal fell far short of Moscow’s concept of replacing Cold War structures with a new system of pan-European collective security but it was not so distant from the Soviet foreign ministry’s reformulation of its policy position in the aftermath of the Geneva Summit.

The Western position was set out in a confidential four-power paper on policy and tactics to be pursued at the Geneva conference, prepared by a working group that met in Paris from 10-20 October. On 28 October, however, the KGB was able to present Khrushchev with a complete Russian translation of the French version of this document.¹⁴⁴ It is not clear whether or not Molotov saw the document, but its contents would not have surprised him. The possibility that the West would make such an offer had been well signaled, and a foreign ministry briefing paper prepared on the eve of the conference correctly anticipated the substance of the Western proposals. Among the other observations in this paper was the comment that while the Western powers were united on the German question, there were differences and tensions in relation to European security. Unlike the Americans, the British and French were not wedded to the idea of German unity as a precondition of an agreement on European security: “the facts show that ruling circles in France and England have a tendency towards the achievement of an agreement between the Western powers and the USSR on measures to reduce tensions in Europe even with the preservation of the two German states.” This tendency was said to be particularly marked in the case of the French, who actually favored the continued

¹⁴³ Eisenhower Papers, A. Whitman File, International Meetings Series, Box 2, Geneva Conference 1955 (4), Eisenhower Library.

¹⁴⁴ The 115-page translation, together with the KGB note to Khrushchev, may be found in RGANI, f.5, o.30, d.115.

division of Germany.¹⁴⁵ This briefing suggested that the Soviets might be able to have their cake and eat it—a deal on European security and retention of the GDR. If there were such a calculation it was an illusion that did not last long, as from the outset of the conference the West made it clear that the price of European collective security was German unity.

The prime directive to the Soviet delegation was to build upon the success of the Geneva Summit and to seek a further reduction of international tension. In his speech to the Supreme Soviet in August, Bulganin had summed up the results of the Geneva Summit as “an important turn towards an improvement in relations between the Four Powers... This turning point will, we hope, end the ‘Cold War’ provided all sides show goodwill and a sincere desire for cooperation.” The opening sessions of the foreign ministers conference seemed to bear out hopes for further progress towards détente. The first item on the agenda was European security. Molotov presented the various Soviet proposals for a staged approach to the achievement of European collective security, while the Western representatives presented their “Outline Terms of a Treaty of Assurance on the Reunification of Germany”¹⁴⁶ which offered a security pact in exchange for all-German elections leading to the reunification of the country. During the course of discussion both sides welcomed each other’s proposals, noting the convergence of positions since the Berlin conference and the Geneva summit. Molotov welcomed the West’s acceptance of the need for European collective security and adopted a conciliatory tone even while criticising the linking of the offer of a Treaty of Assurance to German reunification.¹⁴⁷ Dulles was almost gushing in his appraisal of progress towards an agreement, saying on 2 November: “as I have examined in parallel columns the proposals put forward by the Western powers... and compared them with the proposals and positions advanced by Mr. Molotov... I found that there was a very considerable parallelism in our thinking... we have, I think, achieved a quite remarkable degree of parallel thinking with respect to the concept of European security... It seems to me that

¹⁴⁵ “O Vozmozhnykh Pozitsiyakh Trekh Zapadnykh Derzhav po Germanskomu Voprosu i Voprosu Bezopasnosti v Evrope na Predstoyashchem Soveshchanii Ministrov Inostrannykh Del SSSR, SShA, Anglii i Frantsii v Zheneve,” RGANI, f.5, o.30, d.114, l.191-217.

¹⁴⁶ Department of State Bulletin, 7 November 1955, pp. 730-732.

¹⁴⁷ Molotov’s speeches at the conference may be found in *Soviet News*, 28/10/55, 31/10/55, 1/11/55, 2/11/55, 3/11/55.

we have reached a point where as a result of constructive thinking on both sides we can see a realizable vision of security in Europe.”¹⁴⁸ But, as Dulles went on to say, there was a stumbling block, and that was the failure to agree on the German question.

From the beginning of the conference, Western representatives pressed Molotov on the question of all-German elections, pointing out that the directive agreed at the Geneva Summit stated that “the settlement of the German question and the re-unification of Germany by means of free elections shall be carried out in conformity with the national interests of the German people and the interests of European security.”¹⁴⁹ They also reminded Molotov that he had been in favor of all-German elections at the Berlin conference. In response Molotov repeated the Soviet line that the issue had changed since Berlin and that progress towards elections had to be based on the recognition of the existence of two German states with different social systems. Molotov further argued that European security should come first and would provide the foundation for Germany’s reunification as a democratic and peaceful state. The way forward, said Molotov, was the rapprochement of the two Germanies and, to this end, he proposed the establishment of an all-German council of representatives of the GDR and the FRG. Molotov did not rule out all-German elections in the long run but made it clear that in no circumstances would a united Germany in NATO be an acceptable proposition. The continued participation of the FRG in NATO was another matter and the implication of Soviet proposals for a NATO–Warsaw Pact non-aggression pact was that West Germany could remain a member of the Western alliance for the foreseeable future.

These exchanges between Molotov and the Western foreign ministers on the German question were cordial and well-reasoned on both sides. But it was obvious that there could be no further progress on negotiations for a European security pact in the absence of a deal on all-German elections. At this point in the proceedings Molotov returned to Moscow for consultations with the Soviet leadership. At a meeting of the Presidium on 6 November he introduced a resolution on “European Security and Germany” that was designed to unblock the impasse on all-German elections. Molotov’s resolution in effect proposed a return to the earlier Soviet position on the German

¹⁴⁸ *Department of State Bulletin*, 14 November 1955, pp. 780-781.

¹⁴⁹ Ironically, it was Molotov himself who had proposed this formulation at the Geneva summit. See AVPRF f.448, o.1, p.3, d.8, l.54-55.

question: there could be elections and a united Germany provided it remained neutral. Crucially, the resolution specified that the GDR and the FRG would discuss and prepare for all-German elections in the shortest possible time. This commitment to elections was hedged with restrictions—for example in relation to the protection of the “democratic and social reforms and freedoms” of the German people—but it opened the door to further discussions with the West. The document concluded that in order to facilitate the freest possible elections all foreign troops (apart from some limited detachments) should be withdrawn from Germany within three months. This was all too much for the Soviet leadership, who rejected Molotov’s proposal and resolved to reaffirm existing directives to the Soviet delegation to the conference.¹⁵⁰ According to notes of the Presidium discussion on 6 November Khrushchev objected to Molotov’s proposal as follows:

The course of the conference is normal. The delegation has done everything. What is proposed is not worth going for. Many hidden dangers. Dulles is maneuvering. They could go for a withdrawal of troops. The Germans will be disoriented if we leave with nothing. It doesn’t matter, we can live with it another year.

Molotov replied that “this proposal arises from the fact that to the Germans it looks like [the West] is for elections and we are not. Tactically we should not place ourselves in a less favorable position. We demand from them the repudiation of the Paris agreements.” Khrushchev, however, was supported by the rest of the Soviet leadership and he spoke again at the end of the discussion:

The cry will go out that the position of power has prevailed. The Germans from the GDR will say ‘you have betrayed us’. We can’t take the risk. Twenty million Germans we have in our confidence. In the center of Europe. New tactics must be worked out. Patience and persistence must be displayed. No change in the position.

The discussion continued at the Presidium meeting the next day, with Khrushchev arguing:

¹⁵⁰ The resolution and the Presidium decision to reject it may be found in A. A. Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954-1964: Postanovleniya, 1954-1958*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2006), pp. 104-107.

A year ago we raised the question of elections. Then they did not accept. Now the position has changed. Now from a position of power they want to talk about elections. It is necessary to confront them with our arguments. You [Molotov] say ‘if the FRG leaves NATO;’ don’t get involved in this discussion. Better to pass this question to the Germans. The question of European security is a general question and it can be resolved with two Germanies. We want to preserve the system formed in the GDR—this should be said.¹⁵¹

Once again, Khrushchev was supported by the other Presidium members and the door was firmly closed to further negotiations about all-German elections. Molotov returned to Berlin and, in line with his brief, gave a speech on 8 November that not only ruled out all-German elections for the foreseeable future but gave East Germany a virtual veto on Germany’s reunification:

A mechanical merging of the two parts of Germany through so-called free elections...might result in the violation of the vital interests of the working people of the German Democratic Republic...Naturally one cannot agree to the factories and mills, the land and its mineral wealth being taken away from the working people of the German Democratic Republic...the only way of finding a correct solution of the German problem is to take full account of the fact that two different German states exist on the territory of Germany, and that the reunification of Germany cannot be effected except by the mutual agreement of these states.¹⁵²

Dulles correctly gauged the magnitude of the shift in the Soviet position in his responding speech on 9 November:

Yesterday Mr. Molotov, just returned from Moscow, made a statement on behalf of the Soviet Union. It had such grave implications that I asked that

¹⁵¹ A.A. Fursenko (ed.), *Prezidium TsK KPSS, 1954-1964: Chernovye Protokol’nye Zapisi Zasedanii Stenogrammy*, (Moscow: Rosspen, 2004) pp. 58-60.

¹⁵² *Soviet News*, 9 November 1955, p. 2. One witness to these events is Oleg Troyanovskii, a member of Molotov’s delegation in Geneva, who recalled in his memoirs: “Molotov and Gromyko went to Khrushchev, who was on holiday in the Crimea. I don’t know why but they took me with them. On the journey and from their conversations I found out that they had the text of an important proposal which could lead to the success of the conference. However, after talking to Khrushchev they came back depressed and angry. The [Foreign] Ministers Conference turned out to be fruitless.” (*Cherez Gody i Rasstoyaniya*, Vagrius: Moscow 1997 p.190). Another witness is Harold Macmillan, the British Foreign Secretary, who wrote in his memoirs that at the Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference he “could not help feeling there was some conflict of view and purpose inside the Soviet Government. Molotov had seemed at first uncertain what line to follow. It was only after his return from his visit to Moscow that he launched into the most intransigent and violent of his diatribes.” (*Tides of Fortune, 1945-1955*, Macmillan: London 1969 p.649.)

we should suspend our meeting until today so as to be able to give his statement deliberate thought...The Soviet Union says in the most categorical manner that the security of Europe is best assured by a continued division of Germany, at least until Germany can be united under conditions which would Sovietize the whole of Germany...I would be less than frank if I did not say that, as far as the United States is concerned, what has happened here has largely shattered such confidence as was born with the summit conference at Geneva.¹⁵³

With no prospect of a deal on all-German elections, the Western offer of a European security pact was off the table and the conference closed without agreement. The terse communiqué issued at the end of the conference noted that there had been a “frank and comprehensive discussion” and that the four foreign ministers had agreed to recommend to their governments that future discussions should be conducted through diplomatic channels. The Soviet foreign ministry’s assessment of the conference in a draft telegram to other socialist countries was that it showed that the Western states were not interested in collective security, only “the liquidation of the GDR, the remilitarization of all Germany, and the inclusion of a united Germany in a Western military bloc.”¹⁵⁴ The Western states “do not want to discuss with the Soviet Union in a businesslike way the question of European security or the German question” stated a draft report by Molotov. The best that could be said about the conference was that while the international atmosphere “was not better, it was not worse.”¹⁵⁵ Molotov’s conference report was never published. The official Soviet verdict on the conference was given by Khrushchev following his return from a triumphant tour of Burma and India in autumn 1955. Khrushchev was accompanied on the tour by Bulganin and both men gave reports to the Supreme Soviet at the end of December. Bulganin’s report concentrated on the result of the trip itself, but Khrushchev took the opportunity to deliver his first major, wide-ranging speech on foreign policy.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵³ *Department of State Bulletin*, 21 November, 1955, pp. 825-827.

¹⁵⁴ “Informatsiya o Zhenevskom Soveshchaniy dlya Pravitel’stv Stran Narodnoi Demokratii i Ugolslavii,” AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.4, d.51, l.2-10

¹⁵⁵ “Zayavlenie V.M. Molotova ob Itogakh Soveshchaniya Ministrov Inostrannykh Del SSSR, SShA, Velikobritanii i Frantsii v Zheneve,” AVPRF, f.06, o.14, p.4, d.52, l.2-17.

¹⁵⁶ “Zasedaniya Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR: Rech’ Tovarishcha N.S. Khrushcheva,” *Pravda*, 30 December 1955.

Khrushchev's speech was fiercely polemical and highly ideological. The Soviet Union, said Khrushchev, stood for peaceful coexistence and peaceful competition with the capitalist world, but that did not mean it had or would ever abandon its ideology: "We have never and will never abandon our ideas or the struggle for the victory of communism. We will never be disarmed ideologically!" In a similar tone—and rather curiously given that he abolished the organization a few months later—Khrushchev defended the Cominform: "Of course the opponents of communism don't like the Cominform...Enemies of communism don't only not like the Cominform, they don't like the fact that every year more and more people from every country are being won to its banner." As might be expected, Khrushchev blamed the West for the decline in the "spirit of Geneva" and for the failure of the foreign ministers conference:

The most acute question today is the question of European security. The settlement of other international questions depends on the resolution of this question. You know, however, that our partners in negotiations – the USA, England, and France—counterposed the German question. Their position was that in order for West Germany to unite with the GDR the social gains of the GDR would have to be liquidated, the country armed to the teeth and Germany included in NATO. Under such conditions they would have no objection to signing an agreement on European security, even though in that event not only would there be no safeguarding of European security, there would be an increase in the threat of the outbreak of a new war in Europe, with grave consequences for its peoples.

According to Khrushchev the Western aim in the negotiations was not just to strengthen NATO but to force the USSR and the socialist camp to capitulate and accept their conditions. "Some security!" was Khrushchev's sardonic comment. Khrushchev also repeated the argument he had made at the Presidium meeting in November: the fact that Germany's reunification was not possible in the present circumstances ought not impede an agreement on European collective security, as it was a separate issue. In this regard he made favorable mention of Eden and Faure's comments on European security at the Geneva Summit, saying that these statements constituted a basis for negotiations. However, it was precisely on the issue of the linkage of the German question to European security that negotiations at the foreign ministers conference had broken down.

Khrushchev said nothing about how this difference between the Western and Soviet positions might be overcome.

Conclusion

In her study of ‘missed opportunities’ in the history of the Cold War, Deborah Welch Larson argued that to deem an event a missed opportunity, there must be a plausible counterfactual outcome which both sides could have agreed on at the time. As she puts it: “to make the case for missed opportunities entails showing that both sides wanted an agreement, that history need not be completely rewritten to end up with a different outcome—in other words, that a plausible sequence of events could have led to an agreement.”¹⁵⁷ One of her case studies was the possibility of resolving the German question after Stalin’s death. She argues that there was such an opportunity and the best chance to realize it came in 1953–1954—before West German entry into NATO and before the consolidation of East Germany as a socialist state. The opportunity failed to materialize, she says, because of mutual mistrust based on “ideological differences, historical baggage, and intuitive mental biases.”¹⁵⁸ In her detailed analysis of what went wrong Larson also notes the complicating impact on Moscow’s foreign policy of Soviet domestic politics, including personal and political rivalries within the post-Stalin leadership.¹⁵⁹

This paper has vindicated much of Larson’s general argument. The Soviets were serious about a negotiated settlement of the German question, including the holding of free all-German elections, provided their security interests could be guaranteed. That meant the establishment of a European collective security system and the neutralization of a united Germany. After the FRG’s entry into NATO, Moscow backed away from the strategy of giving up the GDR in exchange for collective security, but the possibility of such a deal remained even until the foreign ministers conference of October–November 1955. By the time that conference was held there had been a significant convergence of

¹⁵⁷ D.W. Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: U.S.-Soviet Relations during the Cold War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997) p. 3.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid* p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ *ibid* chap. 2.

the Western and Soviet positions on European collective security. Positions on the German question had, it is true, diverged, but a Soviet-Western compromise on a gradual transition toward German reunification with the FRG and the GDR remaining members of their respective blocs was still possible in the context of moves towards long-term détente and the establishment of pan-European collective security structures.


On the Soviet side the main obstacle to such a deal was Khrushchev's domination of the Presidium and of Soviet foreign policy. Working without the benefit of access to Russian archives, Larson – like many other historians – misread the divisions over foreign policy within the Soviet leadership. The main player on the Soviet side promoting détente, collective security and a negotiated settlement of the German question was Molotov, who was far from being the conservative hardliner depicted by Larson. Malenkov—the hero of Larson's and many other narratives—certainly favored constructive negotiations with the West, as did Beria, but Molotov and his foreign ministry were the innovators, initiators, and promoters of this policy. Khrushchev, by contrast, preferred a foreign policy that emphasised ideological militancy and political struggle rather than diplomatic negotiations. His priority was the strengthening of the socialist camp and that meant a preference for the maintenance of communist control over East Germany rather than diplomatic gains in relation to collective security. It was unfortunate that Molotov's dispute with Khrushchev over Yugoslavia in the first half of 1955—which led to his isolation within the Presidium—coincided with the final stages of the process leading to West German rearmament and FRG admission to NATO. Simultaneously, Molotov's ability to control foreign policy was weakened while Khrushchev's arguments in favor of the more cautious two Germanies strategy were strengthened. Timing was all-important. An earlier breakthrough in Soviet–Western negotiations about collective security and the German question may have strengthened Molotov's position sufficiently for him to counterbalance Khrushchev's more militant stance. By the time of the Geneva Foreign Ministers Conference only radical concessions by the West on the German question could have persuaded Khrushchev and the rest of the Soviet leadership to step away from the policy of unconditional and unbending support for the GDR.

In his 'chance for peace' speech in April 1953 Eisenhower blamed the USSR for the Cold War and demanded that the Soviets demonstrate their peaceful intentions by ending the war in Korea, signing an Austrian treaty, releasing POWs, entering into serious negotiations about disarmament and arms control, and allowing the peoples of Eastern Europe the freedom to choose their own governments. Two years later all these demands had been met, except for the liberation of Eastern Europe, and there was never any possibility that the Soviet leadership of that era would concede defeat in the Cold War by giving up the communist bloc. Giving up East Germany was another matter and the evidence shows that until mid-1955 there was a definite chance of a deal on all-German elections leading to German unity in exchange for an agreement on European collective security. Moscow's original proposal for European collective security was as unrealistic as Eisenhower's call for the liquidation of the communist bloc, but by late 1955 Soviet proposals had evolved into a concept of an organized détente between the two blocs leading to the gradual dissolution of Cold War structures. In that context a compromise between the Soviet demand for a neutral Germany and the Western desire to strengthen the NATO alliance by incorporating the FRG would have been entirely possible, given a degree of trust and goodwill on both sides. This is not to say that the chance for peace, had it been grasped, would have been unproblematic. No one knows what the impact of losing the GDR would have had on Soviet control over Eastern Europe or on the socialist system in the USSR itself. Nor is it certain that a united Germany would have been content for long with neutralization, limited levels of arms, and a subordinate role within a system of European collective security. Quite possibly, the end of the Cold War would have led to more insecurity and instability in Europe. But success for the Soviet campaign for collective security might also have led to a prolonged and deep European détente that would have precluded the many negative consequences of the decades of Cold War that followed.

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