PART TWO: EXPANSION

Chapter 2: The Imperial and Ideological Paradigm

1. Parameters of the Paradigm

At the Twenty-eighth and last CPSU Congress, in July 1990, Foreign Minister Shevardnadze asked the assembled party officials: 'We have grown accustomed to certain German realities. We have seen in them a guarantee of our security. But let us think about this: Can there be a reliable guarantee [of security] based on the artificial and unnatural division of a great nation? And how long can it last?'[89] Why, in the more than forty years of the division of Germany, had no one before him dared stand up and ask such a pertinent question?

The disadvantages of the division as a perennial state of confrontation with the West should always have been obvious to Soviet leaders. The problem, therefore, arises as to what may have led Stalin to opt or, as the case may be, settle for a divided rather than an undivided Germany. Was it *not* patently obvious from the very beginning that the division of Germany could not last? If so, will the historical record now confirm Gorbachev's 'belief' that Stalin was ready, 'until the very end, to pay a price for a neutral Germany'?[90] Similarly, how credible is Politburo member Aleksandr Yakovlev's assertion that 'we always advanced the question of Germany's unification' but especially 'at the end of 1945 or the beginning of 1946, and then repeatedly during the 1950s'?[91] Is it true, as one of the present Russian specialists on international relations claims, that the Soviet leadership, in the period from the end of the war until the mid-1950s, 'more or less consistently supported German unification'; that a 'peaceful, democratic, and neutral Germany' was a 'genuine' goal of Soviet diplomacy; and that this conclusion is supported by 'geopolitical logic – perhaps the only kind that Stalin mastered'?[92]

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89 'Otchety chlenov i kandidatov v chleni Politbiuro, sekretarei TsK KPSS', *Pravda*, 5 July 1990.

90 Michail Gorbatschow, *Erinnerungen* (Berlin: Siedler, 1995), p. 701.

91 'Otvety na voprosy uchastnikov s"ezda', *Pravda*, 11 July 1990.

92 Sergei A. Karaganov, 'Implications of German Unification for the Former Soviet Union', in Paul B. Stares, ed., *The New Germany in the New Europe* (Washington:

To answer such questions, it is useful to put Soviet policies on the German problem under Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev into an appropriate framework of analysis. Such a framework can be called the Ideological and Imperial paradigm, the essence of which will be held to consist of a close interrelationship between power and ideology in domestic politics and between imperial and revolutionary purposes in foreign policy.[93] The confluence of these two dimensions is, of course, the norm rather than the exception. Empires cannot be built without power. Imperial control, in turn, is difficult to maintain without universal appeal and purpose. In the period from the ancient Egyptian theocracies to Europe in the age of absolutism and the 'divine right of kings', power was legitimized primarily by religion and dogma. After the Enlightenment, this form of legitimation was replaced by more rational constructs, of which Marxism-Leninism is one example. For the present purpose, to explain the ideological part of the dual paradigm, it is appropriate to clarify what is meant by ideology, to relate Marxism-Leninism to that clarification and to describe its impact on Soviet foreign policy.

The Ideological Dimension

Ideology can be defined as a comprehensive system of political beliefs that consists of cognitive, normative, and operational components.[94] The

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The Brookings Institution, 1992), p. 332. Karaganov, at that time, was deputy director of the Institute on Europe at the Russian Academy of Sciences.

93 This paradigm was first developed in my article, 'Russia as a "Great Power" in World Affairs: Images and Reality', *International Affairs* (London), Vol. 71, No. 1 (January 1995), pp. 35-68. The utility of such a framework was recognized also by Zubok and Pleshakov. In what is one of the best recent reconsiderations of the Stalin and Khrushchev era – like the present book based on new archival evidence and memoirs – the authors proceed from the assumption that Stalin saw no contradiction between strengthening the Soviet Union and empire building, on the one hand, and advancing the cause of world revolution, on the other. They argue that 'It was this *revolutionary-imperial paradigm* that the USSR followed consistently from the early 1920s', that is, from the emergence of Stalinism to the Khrushchev era; Vladislav Zubok and Constantin Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 13 (italics mine).

94 This enumeration of the components of ideology and the subsequent formulations draw on Nigel Gould-Davies, Introduction to *Ideology and Soviet Foreign Policy*,

cognitive or analytical element provides a theory about the nature of social and political life and provides a set of concepts and categories for interpreting specific situations and events. The normative aspect articulates a set of fundamental values and purposes that are considered the ultimate objectives of political life and provide a legitimation of behaviour. The tactical, instrumental, or operational properties refer to principles of conduct and axioms of behaviour that guide concrete action toward the attainment of objectives. Its coherence, rigor, and claim to absolute truth distinguish ideology from looser categories of belief systems, such as liberalism, conservatism, as well as *mentalité* and culture.[95] Ideologies also differ from two other kinds of ideational systems of comparable rigor: unlike philosophies, they include an explicit commitment to the use of force for the attainment of political objectives; and unlike religion, they are founded upon claims to knowledge about the nature of social existence rather than on faith in a transcendent reality.[96]

If, then, an ideology can be understood to be a highly structured and absolutist system of political beliefs, a *revolutionary* ideology is one that is incompatible with the existing political order. Its interpretation of history and social life is radically different from that of the other members of a given international order; its objective is not the improvement but the fundamental transformation of this order and its replacement with a new system based on higher principles. For this purpose, it uses methods not normally sanctioned by the established order. Since Marxism-Leninism claimed to furnish a 'scientific' explanation of political and socio-economic phenomena, it is clearly an example of a revolutionary ideology. It purported simultaneously to provide a philosophical method (dialectical materialism); a teleological interpretation of world history (historical materialism); and principles of political economy with 'laws of development' pertaining to capitalist and socialist systems.

Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University (then in progress, co-supervised by this author). The threefold differentiation of ideology was adopted also by Stephen White and Alex Pravda, eds., *Ideology and Soviet Politics* (Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1989).

95 The difference between ideology and political beliefs was aptly made, and applied to the Soviet Union and the United States respectively, by Zbigniew Brzezinski and Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Power: USA–USSR* (New York: Viking Press, 1964).

96 Gould-Davies, Introduction to *Ideology and Soviet Foreign Policy*.

This is not the place to repeat at length the arguments of various schools of thought concerning the significance of Marxist-Leninist ideology for Soviet foreign policy or, as the case may be, lack thereof. Stated briefly for the present purposes, it is useful to proceed from the premises that there is no necessary contradiction between Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Soviet 'national interest'; that national interests are not self-evident but have to be defined by the political process; that such a definition in the Soviet case certainly had a strong ideological component; and that the latter was *adapted* to new conditions, not abandoned. Soviet foreign policy, furthermore, was not that of a traditional state, formulated by the foreign ministry, but that of a revisionist power whose policies were determined primarily by the Communist Party, the institutional embodiment of ideology.[97]

The working assumption here, then, is that the analytical properties of ideology, or at least its core elements, provided a filter through which the Soviet leaders interpreted reality, and that the 'balance of power' also had an ideologically determined equivalent: the 'correlation of forces'.[98] Concerning the issue of legitimation versus mobilization, the question as to whether the Soviet leaders genuinely believed in ideological precepts is immaterial, since even false priests, apostates, and cynics, in order to serve and stay in power, are constrained to act in accordance with the official belief system and institutional requirements. The Marxist-Leninist claim to 'scientific' – absolute and universal – truth required eradication of actu-

97 This is a summary of the main arguments by this author developed in his article 'Ideology in the Soviet View of International Affairs', in Christoph Bertram, ed., *Prospects of Soviet Military Power in the 1980s* (London: Macmillan, 1980), pp. 103-10.

98 The ideological content of the 'correlation of forces' was aptly described by Raymond L. Garthoff, 'The Concept of the Balance of Forces in Soviet Policy-Making', *World Politics*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (October 1951), pp. 84-111; this author extended Garthoff's argument in his article on 'The Political Rationale of Soviet Military Capabilities and Doctrine', in *Strengthening Conventional Deterrence in Europe: Proposals for the 1980s*, Report of the European Security Study (ESECS) (London: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 67-104. Confirmation of the argument was provided also by Vernon Aspaturian, 'Soviet Global Power and the Correlation of Forces', *Problems of Communism*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (May-June 1980), pp. 1-18. Some of the Soviet portrayals are Georgi Shakhnazarov, 'Deistvennye faktory mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii', *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn'* (Moscow), No. 1 (1977), pp. 87-96, and Vadim V. Zagladin, 'World Balance of Forces and the Development of International Relations', *International Affairs* (Moscow), No. 3 (1985), pp. 65-79.

al or potential challenges. Hence, whatever their preferences and convictions, the Soviet leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev had to contend just as much with deviationist phenomena under the heading of 'socialism', such as Maoism, the Prague Spring, and Eurocommunism, as with Western liberalism and capitalism. Ideology, therefore, of necessity had not only an *ex post facto* but also an *ex ante*, motivating and mobilizing, function.

As codified in Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* and subsequent communist party documents, the constituent elements of the ideological part of the paradigm can be summarized as follows:

1. International relations are an extension of domestic class struggle to the international arena.
2. There is an irreconcilable contradiction between two opposed socioeconomic systems – socialism and capitalism.
3. Imperialism, the highest stage of capitalism, is inherently militaristic and aggressive.
4. There is a constant redistribution of power among the capitalist countries and changing coalitions and power centres. The contradictions between these centres – the United States, Western Europe, and Japan in post-war conditions – are irreconcilable; the forces that divide these centres are more basic than those that unite them.
5. Conflict ('a series of frightful collisions') among the imperialist states, that is, military conflict (war), is as inevitable as war between imperialism and socialism.
6. In the long run, the correlation of forces will shift in favor of socialism. Conflict will end only with the victory of socialism. This is historically predetermined. The shift will occur because of (a) the sharpening of contradictions in the imperialist system; (b) the superiority of the socialist over the capitalist mode of production; (c) the growing strength of national-liberation movements; and (d) the emergence of new states with a non-capitalist and ultimately socialist orientation.
7. Since class relations are the determining factor of international affairs, nationalism will wither away. Nationalist phenomena under socialism are merely *perezhitki proshlogo:* the remnants of an outdated socioeconomic system.

The conduct of Soviet foreign policy was constrained by a narrow spectrum of interpretation, within which a 'correct' and 'principled' policy had to be pursued. Furthermore, ideology gave rise to certain axioms or operational principles of Soviet foreign policy behaviour, which can be defined as follows:

1. Since individual nations and coalitions of states are divided internally along class lines, Soviet foreign policy has to be conducted on two tiers or tracks: the ideological, or socio-economic, level and the state-to-state level. 'Internal contradictions' within and among capitalist countries are an important asset that should be utilized, wherever appropriate, with the help of 'peace movements' and the communist parties.
2. Since 'peaceful coexistence' can never be a goal in itself but is only a *tactical* device, and since only countries with the same or similar system structure as that of the Soviet Union can be regarded as trustworthy, cooperation with the West can only be *limited* and *temporary*.
3. Since the adversary 'power centres of imperialism' must be expected to exploit economic weaknesses of the socialist countries and exert pressure, it is necessary, in economic affairs, to pursue *autarkist policies*.
4. Since the restoration of capitalism in a socialist state ('counter-revolution') is a betrayal of principles and could be the prelude to a general 'roll back' of socialism, *counter-revolution must be prevented*. However, limits set by the risks of military conflict with the West have to be observed.
5. Since ideology ('history') provides legitimacy, the *use of force* presents no moral problem; it is only a *matter of expediency*.

To turn to the 'imperial' dimension of the paradigm, a paradox must be noted first. There was very little in Marxist-Leninist ideology that could have been construed as providing the basis for the establishment of an imperial system. The essence of this body of thought was the idea that *socio-economic forces* rather than political or military power propel history. State institutions, military establishments included, were supposed to 'wither away'. Yet, as noted, the Czarist empire was reconstituted under Soviet rule and extended, first regionally, then globally. Military and geopolitical factors in Soviet policy began to take precedence over economic considerations. Despite all the Soviet claims about the greater sophistication of the 'correlation of forces' theory as compared with bourgeois Western 'balance of power' constructs, Soviet leaders in foreign policy conformed to the most primitive notions of Realist theory and all of the above-noted myths of empire.

The Imperial Dimension

The dichotomy between Marxist-Leninist ideology and the Soviet brand of Realism, therefore, is more apparent than real. Before attempting to demonstrate this, the basic elements of the 'imperial' part of the paradigm will be enumerated. These elements had to be distilled primarily from what Soviet leaders said privately and derived from the actual conduct of their foreign policy rather than from official, publicly accessible sources. The constituent elements of this part of the paradigm include the following:

1. Power, prestige, status, and influence of any given country in world affairs depend on the size of its population, geographical expanse, endowment with natural resources, volume of industrial and agricultural output, and access to or control over human and material resources abroad. Expansion will add to the country's resources and thereby to its power and prestige.
2. The single most important factor determining the influence of a great nation in international affairs is military power. Qualitative indicators are important, as is the morale of the armed forces, but so are quantitative indicators, such as the number of divisions, tanks, aircraft, and artillery, and the number of nuclear missiles and warheads. In fact, quantity can make up for deficiencies in quality.
3. Military threats, whether explicit or implicit, will make opponents compliant. The greater the discrepancy between one's own military capabilities and that of the opponent(s), the more effective the threat. Both the domestic political orientation and the foreign policies of allies and adversaries can be influenced by external pressure.
4. Close attention, therefore, has to be paid to the 'correlation of forces'. The Soviet Union, and the coalition of states over which it presides, must be at least as strong as all of the potential enemies combined, and preferably stronger.
5. Given the anarchic nature of the international system, the lack of common values and the objective condition of conflict between two antagonist socio-economic systems, security cannot be left to the good intentions of the adversary. It must be sought through unilateral efforts.
6. Political means to achieve security, including the utilization of contradictions within and between inimical countries, should not be neglected. However, these are only supplementary to the military-technical means at one's disposal.

7. The Western countries' clamour for the universal dissemination of human and civil rights, pluralism, democracy and the 'free flow of information' as well as the encouragement of nationalism and the deployment of what their theorists call 'transnational' forces have to be considered attempts at subverting Soviet global and regional influence and control. Vigilance and counteraction are required to stave off such attempts.

The enumeration of imperial elements shows that they *supplement* rather than supplant the ideological aspects of the dual paradigm. As early as 1924, Stalin had clarified this when he declared: 'Soviet power in Russia is the base, the bulwark, and the refuge of the revolutionary movement of the entire world.'[99] In the 1930s, he had reiterated the confluence of ideological and imperial dimensions in Soviet foreign policy by providing a standard definition of a 'true internationalist' as someone who 'is ready to defend the USSR without reservation, without wavering, unconditionally'.[100]

One explanation of this confluence lies in the fact that Marxist ideology has many facets and that Lenin and Stalin, in the course of 'creative development of theory' and adaptation of Marxism to Russian conditions, emphasized certain portions of the theory to the almost complete exclusion of others. This led to the perversion or deformation of some of the main principles of Marxist thought. It pertained above all to the *de facto* emphasis placed by the Soviet leaders on military power as an agent of international change rather than socio-economic development.

A second explanation for the confluence of ideological and imperial dimensions of the paradigm rather than their contradiction is connected with the dogma of the 'irreconcilable' and 'inevitable' conflict between two opposed systems. This notion is essentially the ideological equivalent of the Realist view of international relations as a zero-sum game, in which one side's loss is the other's gain, and victory and defeat are the only possible outcomes.

A third explanation has much to do with the fact that the revolution did not occur in the advanced capitalist countries, such as Germany and England, but in backward Russia. Apart from the basic structural deficiencies of the system itself, this was one of the reasons why the heralded 'superi-

99 J. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, Vol. 6 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1947), p. 265, as quoted by Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, p. 13.

100 J. V. Stalin, *Sochineniia*, Vol. 10 (Moscow: Politizdat, 1948), p. 53.

ority of the socialist over the capitalist mode of production' could not be achieved, and why the communist system was imposed, maintained, and expanded by force, rather than established and supported by popular will. As time went by and imperial overstretch began to set in, the attractiveness of the Soviet-type system and model of development waned even more. This reinforced the reliance on military means to maintain influence and control.

Having established the Ideological and Imperial paradigm as a basic framework of analysis, it is now appropriate to look at its practical consequences and its application to Soviet policy toward Germany.

2. The Division of Germany: Design or Default?

The main propositions flowing from the paradigm are that (1) there was considerable continuity in Soviet policy on the German problem, the Kremlin leaders from Stalin to Gorbachev adhering to the principle of the existence of two German states and relying on East Germany as a strategic ally in their attempt to build an empire and control Eastern Europe; (2) these and other top ranking party leaders may have realized the high costs and negative consequences of clinging to the *status quo* on the German problem and that this may have especially been true for Lavrenti Beria, the former secret service chief, but that an overwhelming majority of the collective leadership rejected the idea of abandoning the GDR; and (3) that most of the initiatives on the German problem, including Stalin's 'peace note' of March 1952, were primarily political and propagandistic exercises rather than a genuine search to end the division of Germany.

It is also one of the central arguments of this book that the establishment of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe and the concomitant division of Germany may not have been the inevitable consequence of Stalin's adherence to the paradigm but that it was a logically consistent and *probable* result. An apt description of this nexus between the paradigm and the division of Germany after World War II can be found in Gorbachev's observation that

> It was nothing but imperial ideology and policy, the wish to create the most [favourable] external conditions for socialism and for the USSR, that prompted the start of the race of nuclear and other arms after 1945, just when the crushing defeat of fascism and militarism was, it would seem, offering a realistic opportunity for building a world without wars and a mechanism of inter-

> national cooperation – the United Nations – had been created for this purpose. But imperialism's nature asserted itself that time again.[101]

Only one word was changed in this statement made by Gorbachev at the Twenty-sixth party congress in February 1986. The 'favourable' in the square bracket above was 'unfavourable' in the original, and the imperialism he referred to was not that of the Soviet Union but purportedly that of the United States.

As this example of mirror imaging in the interpretation of international politics indicates, the Soviet and the Russian narrative consistently and uncompromisingly asserts that Stalin did not want to divide Germany and that the West was responsible for the division. The fatal flaw in this argument lies in the fact that the latter does not follow from the former. There is indeed, as will be shown, a fair amount of evidence to suggest that Stalin was aware of, and averse to, the risks that the division of Germany would pose; that he was conscious of the potentially disruptive strength of German nationalism; that German nationalism could never be reconciled with a divided country; and that he would, therefore, have preferred, as he is reported as having stated at a Politburo meeting at the end of May 1945, a 'united, peaceloving, and democratic state'.[102]

What, however, was meant by 'peaceloving' and 'democratic'? In Moscow's definition, the Soviet Union *was* such a state, as was the GDR after its foundation. The question, therefore, needs to be posed as to whether a systemic structure of a Germany as required by Stalin would have been acceptable to the German population and to the Western allies. If not, the preference for a united Germany, from a practical political point of view, would have been meaningless. This would have been even more correct if each occupation power, sovereign in its area of control, were to proceed unilaterally and impose its own socio-economic and political system. The explanation for the division can be found precisely in the corresponding process. This can be highlighted by Stalin recognition as early as April 1945 when he told a visiting Yugoslav delegation: 'This war is not as in the past; whoever occupies a territory also imposes on it his own so-

101 *Pravda*, 26 February 1986.

102 As reported by Vladimir Semenov, who attended the Politburo meeting; Wladimir S. Semjonow, *Von Stalin bis Gorbatschow: Ein halbes Jahrhundert in diplomatischer Mission, 1939-1991* (Berlin: Nikolaische Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1995), p. 201.

cial system.'[103] In other word, the division of Germany occurred by *default rather than design*. Nevertheless, to repeat, the default was less not accidental. The exigencies of ideology and empire played a decisive role.

To deal systematically with this proposition, it will first be assumed that Stalin acted neither on the basis of revolutionary zeal nor of an expansionist imperial blueprint but attempted to achieve Soviet security interests and that, within that context, four main options could be distinguished. On this basis, Soviet interests and behaviour will then be more directly related to the pressures and requirements generated by the Ideological and Imperial paradigm.

The starting point of analysis could be the battle of Stalingrad, after which victory over Germany became a distinct possibility. This raised the question for the Soviet leadership as to what the post-war European order should look like, which in turn concerned in particular the role of Germany in that order. Twice in the course of a quarter of a century the very existence of the state had been threatened by Germany. Considering Stalin's near paralysis for several weeks after the German attack and the seemingly unstoppable offensives deep into Soviet territory, with German troops reaching the outskirts of Moscow in the winter of 1941, it would have been astonishing had he not seen Germany as the main security issue for years to come.

But how was security *vis-à-vis* Germany to be safeguarded? The answer is, probably by adopting any one of four broad options: (1) a revolutionary transformation of the social and economic system of the whole of Germany under the leadership of a communist party controlled by the Soviet Union; (2) a substantial weakening of the economic and military potential of Germany in conjunction with territorial reductions; (3) division or dismemberment and its long-term enforcement by the four powers; (4) a united, neutral Germany.[104]

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103 Milovan Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, trans. Michael B. Petrovich (New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1962), p. 114.

104 I first discussed these options in my book *Soviet Risk Taking and Crisis Behavior*, pp. 112-161. The approach adopted there and the conclusions coincide with those of Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Vom Reich zur Bundesrepublik: Deutschland im Widerstreit der außenpolitischen Konzeptionen in den Jahren der Besatzungsherrschaft, 1945-1949* (Neuwied und Berlin: Luchterhand, 1966), pp. 201-270. Schwarz's Study is probably the most comprehensive and analytically most satisfactory treatment of Germany in the international context. Although new archival evidence, much of it generated under the auspices of the Woodrow Wilson's In-

Option One: The 'Revolutionary Transformation' of Germany

According to classic Marxist theory, prospects for a revolutionary transformation of Germany in the early post-World War II period were bright. The country, as Stalin commented, had 'an extremely qualified and numerous working class and technical intelligentsia'.[105] In theory, capitalism had reached its highest stage in Germany and had become 'ripe' for the next stage in the historical transformation process. Fascism, an extreme form of imperialism in Marxist terminology, had been discredited. Its collapse had set in motion far-reaching processes of socio-economic change. Conditions for a socialist transformation of Germany could be considered as favourable also because, in one part of Germany, the Soviet Union exerted unchallenged control and could impose its own policies. In the other part, the influx of several millions of refugees from the formerly German regions under Soviet and Polish control, as well as from Czechoslovakia and Hungary, had produced fertile ground for social unrest. In fact, strikes and mass demonstrations against inadequate living conditions and low food rations plagued the Western zones until the spring of 1948. Furthermore, there was a widespread realization among the members of the two parties of the Left, the Social Democrats (SPD) and Communists (KPD), that the disunity of the working class had facilitated the rise of fascism in the 1930s and that it was now necessary to cooperate in the construction of a new Germany.

However, as after World War I, the course of events after World War II took an entirely different direction from what ideology predicted. Such socialist and communist organizations, as well as democratic and antifascist committees, as had sprung up spontaneously after the war, were dissolved in July 1945 by the Soviet Military Administration (SMA) in Germany. Political activity 'from below' was replaced by political manipulation

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ternational Cold War History Project, has thrown more light on Stalin and his policies in general, there is nevertheless very little that has come to light concerning his thinking and policies on the German problem. This was a problem which was encountered not only by this author but also by Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*; Vojtech Mastny, *The Cold War and Soviet Insecurity: The Stalin Years* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); and Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1995).

105 Stalin as quoted by Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 114.

'from above'. The communist *apparat* triumphed over what could have been a powerful independent socialist movement.[106] Resented for its attempts to rally socialists around its flag in an organized as opposed to voluntary fashion, burdened by its association with an occupation power whose internal structure had been consistently rejected by German socialists as a model of development and guilty by association for a hasty and damaging reparations policy pursued by that power, the KPD was losing out in the race with the SPD for the political support of the German population. This led to a sudden reversal by the SMA of its initial preference for separate development of the two parties. In April 1946, therefore, it ordered the merger of the two parties, with control firmly placed in the hands of the communists. Autonomous political development was anathema, as shown by the fact that the merger occurred against the will of the majority of the SPD membership. In that single instance, in the three Western sectors of Berlin, where the merger proposal was put to a test it was rejected by a vast majority (82 percent) of the SPD membership.[107] And despite the fact that, organizationally, the SPD had ceased to exist in the Soviet zone and the SMA was heavily favouring the new Socialist Unity Party (SED), the latter party failed to win an absolute majority of the votes in the October 1946 elections for the regional parliaments. It fared even worse in the elections held in the same month for the city government in Berlin, where the SED received only 19.8 percent of the vote as against 48.7 percent for the SPD, 22.2 percent for the Christian Democrats, and 9.3 percent for the Liberals.[108]

If this was the fate of the political forces favoured by the SMA in the area directly under its control (the Soviet zone), or acting in the shadow of its power (in Berlin), it was clear that the chances for a successful communist revolution, or even the hope of influencing the course of events through a strong communist party, were quite remote in the *western* parts of Germany. The option of a 'revolutionary transformation' of the whole of Germany, therefore, was only theoretical.

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106 Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution*, trans. C. M. Woodhouse (London: Collins, 1957), pp. 325-27.

107 In a ballot on 30 March 1946; see Eberhard Schneider, *Die DDR: Geschichte, Politik, Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart: Verlag Bonn Aktuell, 1975), p. 28.

108 To clarify this point, the SPD had only ceased to exist in the *Soviet zone of occupation*, not in Berlin. The two parties, SPD and SED, were therefore pitted against each other in the city elections.

Option Two: Emasculation of Germany

A second possibility for safeguarding Soviet security interests and preventing German aggression was the weakening of the economic and military potential of Germany and the reduction of German territory. The pursuit of this option was implied in what Stalin said at the Politburo meeting at the end of May 1945, that it was 'unrealistic to think of breaking up Germany into splinters or to destroy its industry and reduce it to an agrarian state. ... The task is not to destroy Germany but to deprive it of the possibility to rise again as an aggressive power in Europe.'[109]

One aspect of weakening Germany was territorial reductions. At the Tehran conference in 1943 it was agreed that the northern part of East Prussia should be transferred to the Soviet Union and a strong Poland created with substantial territorial compensation, at Germany's expense, in the north and west. Churchill's warnings at Yalta 'not to overstuff the Polish goose' were thereby ignored. Polish *de facto* sovereignty was extended to the *western* Neisse river, Stalin thereby laying the basis for the most probable development in the circumstance: long-term Polish-German hostility and Polish dependence on the Soviet Union.[110] Events seemed to drift precisely in that direction because of the expulsion of more than 10 million Germans from the areas east of the Oder and Neisse rivers, the westward shift of several million Poles, and the consolidation of the Soviet and Polish administration in the new territories.

Another important aspect of weakening Germany was reparations. In internal memoranda, at the Allied Control Council, and in the foreign ministers' meetings, the Soviet representatives never tired of pointing to the enormous losses the USSR had incurred during the war. Ivan Maisky, head of the reparations commission, commented on one of its reports that 'Our direct material losses surpass the national wealth of England or Germany and constitute one-third of the overall national wealth of the United States.' He also thought that five million Germans, if they were to work at

109 Semjonow, *Von Stalin bis Gorbatschow*, p. 201.

110 Herbert Feis, *Between War and Peace: The Potsdam Conference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), pp. 221-74. The difference between the western and eastern Neisse, which was at issue at Yalta, was not negligible as it involved the fate of about 2.7 million ethnic Germans and hence the problem of future German revanchism. The significance of the point will be explored below, pp. 86-87.

Soviet plants for ten years, could contribute about $35-40 billion to the Soviet economy.[111] At the Yalta conference, the United States had agreed to $20 billion (half of which for the USSR) as a 'basis for discussion', which Soviet representatives had taken as an agreement in principle. According to the Potsdam Protocol, the Soviet Union was allowed to satisfy its own reparation claims and those of Poland from its own zone of occupation. This it proceeded to do rapaciously even before the war had ended, transferring large amounts of industrial equipment from its zone – as, indeed, it did in the occupied areas in Eastern Europe.[112] According to the Protocol, the Soviet Union was also to receive 15 percent of such usable and complete industrial capital equipment as was unnecessary for the German peace economy *in exchange* for an equivalent value of food, coal, oil products, and other commodities to be agreed upon (category A) and 10 percent of such industrial capital equipment as was not essential for the German peace economy *without payment or exchange* (category B).[113] Removal of equipment as stipulated under A and B was to occur simultaneously, and the amount to be extracted from the Western zones was to be determined within six months after the Potsdam conference.[114] As General Lucius D. Clay observed in September 1945, concurrently with the extraction of reparations from their own zone, the Russians were 'most anxious to get industrial facilities and equipment out of the *Western zone[s]* as quickly as possible'.[115]

The Soviet reparation demands were perfectly understandable from a practical economic point of view because of the USSR's desperate need for capital equipment. This point was emphasized by Semenov and other Soviet foreign ministry officials in talks with Rudolf Nadolny, the German

111 In comments on a July 1944 report, I. Maisky and G. Arkadiev, 'Osnovnie linii reparatsionnoi programmy SSSR', and in a 19 December 1944 letter to Stalin, as quoted by Zubok and Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War*, p. 31.

112 Concerning the impact on and the estimated magnitude of the losses incurred by the East German economy because of Soviet occupation policy, see Adomeit, *Soviet Risk Taking and Crisis Behavior*, pp. 127, 233-34.

113 US Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conference of Berlin (Potsdam)*, Vol. II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1960), pp. 1478-98.

114 Ibid.

115 Letter from Clay to McCloy, 3 September 1945, in Smith, ed., *The Clay Papers*, doc. 30, p. 64 (italics mine).

ambassador to Moscow from 1933-34. In 1946, one of the officials told the former German ambassador that

> Germany should again become big and strong, and be friends with Soviet Union. It should have the right to self-determination. In principle, the Soviet government accepted the Weimar Constitution as a basis [for the political organization of] Germany but the constitutional question was one for Germany to decide. However, the Soviet government *could not compromise on the [question of] reparations from current production; Russia had to be rebuilt first, and then Germany, but not vice versa*.[116]

It would be erroneous, however, to ascribe simplistic Marxist reasoning to Stalin and to assert that he looked at economic issues without regard to their political implications. The Soviet insistence on the breakup of trusts, syndicates, cartels and monopolies, the dismantling of German industry and demands for reparations as well as international control over the Ruhr were all part of an overall objective: the weakening of Germany and, in particular, the emasculation of her military-industrial potential. This was frankly acknowledged by Molotov when he said that 'The aim of completely disarming Germany militarily and economically should also be served by the reparations plan. The fact that until now no such plan has been drawn up, in spite of the repeated demands of the Soviet Government, ... is a dangerous thing from the point of view of safeguarding the future peace and security of nations.'[117]

By 1948, however, the Soviet reparations policy in Germany had come to a dead end, and it appears that the unfolding of the Berlin crisis of 1948-49 was not unrelated to it.[118] This was so because the blatantly exploitative nature of that policy had not only produced negative political consequences for the competition between the two opposed socio-economic systems on German soil but had also begun to affect the economic base of the Soviet zone itself. In 1946, Soviet reparation demands *and* pro-

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116 Rudolf Nadolny, *Mein Beitrag* (Wiesbaden: Limes Verlag, 1955), p. 179 (italics mine). This statement was made during one of Nadolny's visits to Berlin-Karlshorst, the Soviet military headquarters.

117 At the 10 July 1946 meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers in Paris; see V. M. Molotov, *Problems of Foreign Policy: Speeches and Statements, April 1945 - November 1948* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1949), p. 66 (italics mine).

118 The treatment of economic developments in the Soviet zone draws on J. P. Nettl, *The Eastern Zone and Soviet Policy in Germany* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 240-41.

duction in the Soviet zone of occupation had risen sharply. In 1947, however, Soviet reparation policies changed. The removal of capital stock was largely replaced by the extraction of commodities from current production. During that time, although reparations extraction reached unprecedented heights, production still suffered only slightly. But after April 1948, the volume of industrial production in the occupied zone reached its peak. It then dropped sharply and flattened out despite all efforts to reverse this trend. As events were to show, neither the currency reform in the Soviet zone nor East Germany's Two-Year Plan for 1949-50 achieved their stated purpose of substantially increasing production. Stringent limits of growth had resulted from the depletion of raw materials stocks and the small net total of new and replacement investments after subtraction of reparations in the form of capital goods. As the Soviet Union had not been averse to taking food as reparations and continued to remove industrial goods from current production, a wide gap in the standard of living between the Western zones and the Soviet zone could easily be predicted.

In contrast to the developments in the Soviet zone, economic recovery in the Western zones had begun in the latter half of 1947. Industrial production was catching up with that in the Soviet zone relative to the 1936 level. In June 1948, it surpassed that level, and production was given an additional boost by the successful currency reform introduced in the same month. As Germany was considered the key to the success of European economic reconstruction, the prospects for the successful implementation of the European Recovery Program (Marshall Plan), signed in April 1948, and of the objectives of the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OECD), founded in the same month, appeared bright indeed.

Two points about the weakening of Germany still need to be made. One concerns, in May 1946, the suspension − in effect, the end − of the dismantling of capital equipment in the American zone, and with it reparations deliveries to the Soviet Union and also to Western claimants from that zone. Molotov was to deplore this decision at the Moscow Foreign Ministers' Conference in March 1947. He complained that, since the Potsdam conference, the Soviet Union had received only the insignificant sum of $7.5 million in reparations deliveries in exchange for commodities (pursuant to category A of the Potsdam Protocol) and $5 million in reparations

free of charge (category B).[119] But as the cooperation of the prime ministers of the German *Länder* and other German political and economic leaders was needed for the implementation of the London recommendations for the establishment of a separate West German state, it was simply no longer politically feasible to resume reparations deliveries to the Soviet Union. If reparations from *the whole of Germany* were meant to be an element of safeguarding Soviet security within the overall program of emasculating Germany, by 1948 matters looked bleak.

The same can be said for a second issue still to be considered: the controversy about international control of the Ruhr. In the early four-power discussions such control, as the extraction of reparations, was conceived of only within the framework of the whole of Germany. Thus, from the Western point of view, it appeared objectionable for the USSR to retain complete control over the economy in the Soviet zone *and* demand additional rights in the economy of the Western zones. Clay was in full agreement with predominant American and British (and on this issue also French) views when he stated bluntly that 'we should not enter into an agreement for international control [of the Ruhr] until we know that such an agreement will not involve Soviet representation in such control'.[120]

Stalin, as early as April 1945, appeared to be pessimistic about the likely effectiveness of political and economic measures to curb the military and industrial potential of Germany. He assumed that defeated Germany would 'recover, and very quickly' because of its high level of industrialization and, as quoted above, its 'extremely qualified and numerous working class and technical intelligentsia'.[121] He drew the conclusion from this that the Germans would be 'on their feet again' in twelve to fifteen years.[122] On another occasion, as Djilas reported, Stalin rose from the table, 'hitched up his pants as though he was about to wrestle or to box, and

119 Yuri Zhukov, reporting Molotov's statements at the conference, *Pravda*, 31 March 1947. The figures may very well have corresponded to the facts.

120 Clay, Eyes Only, for Draper, Top Secret, CC 3129, 7 February 1948, in Smith, ed., *The Clay Papers*, doc. 329, p. 556.

121 Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, p. 114.

122 Ibid. The Soviet foreign ministry official quoted above expressed a very similar opinion to Nadolny. He told his German visitor that 'the Soviet government was not out to transform Germany into a Soviet satellite (*es zu sowjetisieren*). The Germans at the moment were hungry and downcast, but gradually they would recover, and then they would turn against Russia.' (Nadolny, *Mein Beitrag*, pp. 178-79).

exclaimed: 'The war shall be soon over. We shall recover in fifteen or twenty years, and then we'll have another go at it.'[123] It is fair to infer from all of this that, in Stalin's mind, doubts about the viability of economic and political measures to control Germany, expectations for the speedy recovery of Germany and apprehensions about the possibility or even inevitability of another military conflict were all closely linked.

For all of these reasons, according to simple political logic, Stalin had to resolve a fundamental conflict between economic and political priorities: If Germany was to be preserved or re-established as a *single nation-state*, the time to abandon a politically harmful economic policy had come in the spring and summer of 1948. By that time, the insistent knocks at the door of the three Western zones for the payment of reparations and the demands for international control of the Ruhr had come to sound hollow and anachronistic. A radical change in Soviet economic policy in Germany was required if a united Germany was to respect the security interests of the USSR and economically cooperate with it in good faith.

A similar conclusion had to be drawn if the *division* rather than the emasculation of Germany was to be the main objective of Soviet policy in Germany. If the creation of a West German state were to be answered by the formation of an East German counterpart, the viability of such an entity also necessitated the abandonment of the counterproductive economic policy. What evidence is there that such a course aiming at the division of Germany was deliberately adopted by Stalin and, if so, at what time?

Option Three: Division and Dismemberment

As argued at the beginning of this section, it would be erroneous to say that Soviet policy at the end of World War II had consciously and consistently aimed at the dismemberment or division of Germany. On the contrary, as the end of the war approached, Stalin had increasingly rejected this option. His rationale, to the extent that it can be accurately reconstructed, was rooted primarily in applying lessons of the past. Historically, war-time coalitions in Europe had a tendency to disintegrate after the achievement of victory, and inter-allied agreements had proven difficult to enforce as a consequence. As for Germany, the experience of Versailles

123 Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 114-15.

had amply demonstrated the ineffectiveness of international controls. In fact, international restrictions and tutelage had provided powerful stimuli to revisionist and nationalist tendencies, even though the extent of territorial reductions of Germany after World War I had been limited.

It was reasonable, therefore, to assume that the division or dismemberment of Germany after World War II, too, would unleash powerful forces of German nationalism and create new security risks. Stalin's recognition of this danger is reflected in his statement that 'The experience of history shows that Hitlers come and go but the German nation, the German state, remains.'[124] It was foreshadowed earlier by the appeals to German nationalism rather than to 'progressive forces' as witnessed, in July 1943, by the foundation of the Nationalkomitee Freies Deutschland (Free German National Committee) and the Bund Deutscher Offiziere (Federation of German Officers) in an attempt to bring about an early political solution to the war[125] and by Stalin eschewing the idea of dismemberment at Tehran, being reluctant about it at the Yalta conference and declaring on Victory Day (9 May 1945) that the USSR 'has no intention of either dismembering or destroying Germany'.[126]

The Soviet concern about a possible recrudescence of German nationalism and the difficulty of enforcing a division of Germany was evident also in what Soviet UN ambassador, Andrei Vyshinsky, stated to British war correspondent Alexander Werth in 1947: 'If there isn't a central German government, there will be before long a militarist West German government.'[127] In the same year, Foreign Minister Molotov even opposed the idea of a federalization of Germany as 'dangerous' because it would 'play into the hands of the militarists playing on the German people's longing for "German unity"'.[128]

Finally and perhaps most importantly, the argument that Stalin did not intend to divide Germany is supported by the extent of the transfer of German territory to Poland and the scale of the expulsion of ethnic Germans.

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124 J. V. Stalin, *The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union*, 5th ed. (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1950), p. 84.

125 See Bodo Scheurig, *Freies Deutschland: Das Nationalkomitee und der Bund Deutscher Offiziere in der Sowjetunion 1943-1945* (Munich: Nymphenburger Verlag, 1960).

126 *Pravda*, 10 May 1945.

127 Werth, *Russia: The Post-War Years*, p. 234.

128 At the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Moscow, March 1947, ibid., p. 236.

If Soviet post-war policy had provided for an East German state under Soviet protection, it would have been much better to establish an East German state of roughly the same geographical extent, population, and economic potential as Poland. For Moscow, this would have meant agreeing on the *eastern* rather than the western Neisse river as the border between the two countries: the area separated by the two rivers would have made an important difference because it would not only have added significantly to East Germany's natural resources and production capacity (the area in question had a diverse industrial base) but also to its population (2.7 million people were living in this area, almost all of them ethnic Germans). The problem of the tenuous viability of the GDR, which came to haunt the Soviet Union, but most acutely in the June 1953 popular revolt and the Berlin crisis of 1961, could have been alleviated to a considerable extent by adopting such a course of action.[129]

In retrospect, it appears that the stronger the momentum towards the creation of a separate West German government, the more insistent the Soviet demands for the preservation of German unity and the more insistent the claims that the West was responsible for the division. Thus, at the December 1947 Foreign Ministers' Conference in London, Molotov was reported in *Pravda* as having advocated a 'united, independent, and democratic Germany' and the formation of an 'all-German Consultative Council' but that this had been rejected by the West, and 'instead Western Germany was being turned into the breeding ground for another world war'.[130]

Such charges were repeated in 1948. The note of the Soviet Government to the three Western powers of early March and the justification provided by Marshal Sokolovsky for the termination of Soviet participation in the Control Council at the end of that month took issue with the London conference and charged that the West had deliberately excluded the USSR

129 In recognition of the importance of the border problem for the viability and legitimacy of a future East German state, the United States ambassador in Moscow, Walter Bedell Smith, wrote in August 1948 that if the Western powers 'should be forced out of Berlin' and, following the establishment of a Western German government, a communist dominated government were to be established in eastern Germany, the 'latter's prestige and power of attraction throughout the country might be vastly increased by the return of part of the area east of the Oder and western Neisse rivers'; telegram to Secretary of State Marshall, Secret, 21 August 1948, US Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1948,* Vol. IV, p. 910.

130 *Pravda*, 18 December 1947.

from decision-making and even consultation on problems concerning Germany as a whole.[131] On 26 March, that is, only a few days after Sokolovsky's dramatic walk-out from the Allied Control Council, Lieutenant General Luk'ianchenko of the Soviet military administration in Germany stated for the historical record: 'The division of Germany is already an established fact and [it is clear to all that] the division was caused by the USA, Britain, and France'.[132]

The fact that the USSR increasingly portrayed itself as the champion of German unity and even advocated the holding of a referendum on this question can be explained by the Soviet desire not to be held responsible in a court of history for the powerful drift towards the division of Germany, a drift which the Soviet Union itself had helped to set in motion. But since the division of Germany contained the threat of territorial revisionism and nationalism, it could still have appeared preferable from the Soviet point of view, even in 1948, to be included in the making of decisions concerning Germany as a whole rather than be excluded and faced with a West German state hostile to the USSR by the very circumstances of its creation. Maintenance of unity may also still have appeared advantageous to the Soviet Union since it did not seem to have given up hope of gaining access to reparations from the Western zones, and from the Ruhr in particular.

A detached consideration of Soviet 'national' interests, therefore, would have suggested maintaining a unified German state, neutral and non-communist, based in its internal structure on a system somewhere between socialism and capitalism, with a small army and police force for internal security and self-defense. This is the kind of policy suggested in essence by Stalin in his note to the three Western powers on 10 March 1952, in proposals made by his successors in 1954 and, as applied to Austria, in the State Treaty of 1955. Was this option really ruled out by Stalin or foreclosed by the post-war conditions?

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131 The Soviet government's note to the three Western powers was published in *Pravda*, 9 March 1948; the Soviet version of the crucial events of 20 March (the walkout of the Soviet representative at the Control Council) according to *Pravda*, 22 March 1948.

132 TASS report from Berlin, ibid., 29 March 1948. The phrase of 'The division of Germany is now an accomplished fact' was the line of the day carried verbatim by *Neues Deutschland* and *Tägliche Rundschau*, and it was amplified in an article by *Pravda* correspondent Yuri Korol'kov, *Pravda*, 1 April 1948.

Option Four: Neutralization of Germany

In principle, the option of a unified Germany was not foreclosed. But adopting it would have made it necessary for the Soviet Union to meet certain conditions. It would have required repudiation of the 'two camp' theory with all its implications of militant tactics. It also presupposed a willingness to cooperate with the Western powers in the establishment and management of a new European order. More specifically, the prevention of German revisionism might also have required the return of the areas east of the Oder and Neisse rivers – areas which many Germans, with Western allied encouragement, had already begun to consider as only 'temporarily under Soviet and Polish administration'. Even those Germans who, like Nadolny, were favourably inclined towards the Soviet Union, considered the return of most of these areas an indispensable precondition for an overall Russian-German settlement. This was clearly stated in Nadolny's memorandum of 30 April 1947 to Molotov, in which he expressed his conviction that the

> intended expulsion of nine million Germans from their traditional homeland and the *de facto* separation of the eastern German provinces *will never be accepted by the German people*. However, the German people are prepared to sacrifice as much territory as would be necessary for Polish access to the sea. It is to be hoped that the Russian statesmen will find an appropriate solution.[133]

In the light of what has been said here about the non-viability of a revolutionary transformation of the whole of Germany and the anti-Soviet and, by implication, anti-Russian bias of German nationalism, the option of neutralization, if adopted in the post-war era, would in all likelihood have resulted in a Germany that was orienting itself toward the West. Such a development would probably have been no different than the one that could be observed in Finland and Austria, and indeed also in West Germany. The difference, a crucial one in Stalin's eyes, was one of scale. To prevent a country without a major industrial base and with a population of only about 7 million (Austria) or 5 million (Finland) from becoming a threat to Soviet security was quite a different proposition from one that involved a country with a heavy industrial base and a population of approximately 80 million people.

133 Nadolny, *Mein Beitrag*, p. 180 (italics mine).

The maintenance or reestablishment of German unity in the post-war era, if it involved an expression of preferences by the German people, would undoubtedly have led to a substantial defeat for the Soviet-type system in the eastern zone. There is much merit to the argument, therefore, that Stalin, rather than risking such a development, chose what appeared to him a lesser risk, namely, to hold fast to the area occupied by the Red Army, complete a series of pacts 'with all the states at its western border, from the Black Sea to the Baltic and, after the conclusion of the Soviet-Finnish treaty, right up to the Arctic ocean, deal a 'powerful blow to all instigators of a new world war'[134] and make the resulting sphere of influence safe for the USSR by incorporating the whole of Berlin – were it not for the equally valid argument in Stalin's view that the enforcement of the division of Germany was improbable or impossible.

Given these apparently insoluble dilemmas for Soviet security in the post-war era, it would have been entirely understandable if Soviet policy had merely drifted into acceptance of the division of Germany as inevitable, trying to contain emerging dangers by pursuing conciliatory policies. Instead, militant rhetoric was employed almost throughout the early post-war period and, in the 1948-49 Berlin blockade, a strategy of coercion was adopted, utilizing conventional military superiority in the area and Soviet leverage over 'progressive forces' as means of forcing Western compliance to ill-defined Soviet demands. Perhaps this strategy cannot be explained entirely in rational terms, as a policy arrived at by the careful weighing of ends and means. Beyond the vague feeling or anxiety that Germany had been a threat to Soviet security in the past and that it was likely to be one in the future, Stalin may never really have had a clear conception on how to approach, let alone solve, the German problem.

To that extent, one would also be looking in vain for a single 'decision' that decided the issue of whether Germany should be divided or remain whole. The division occurred as a consequence of a *process* of interaction which, in turn, was driven in large measure by the pressures and requirements generated by the Ideological and Imperial paradigm. Their impact on the process will be analyzed in the following sections.

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134 That was the clarion call sounded in the communist party journal, 'Sovetskaia politika ravnopraviia natsii', *Bol'shevik*, No. 9 (1948), p. 5.

3. The Paradigm Applied: East Germany and Eastern Europe

The paradigm provided powerful reasons for integrating East Germany into a Soviet sphere of influence. The primary function of this sphere, as Shevardnadze later deplored, became that of a 'buffer zone', 'a chain of "allied" countries that would protect us from the West and [justify] the deployment of large Soviet troop contingents in those countries'.[135] Such a conception also 'implied that the Soviet Army had not liberated certain countries of Europe but seized them as war trophies'.[136] It also conforms to the basic attitude of the architects of Soviet imperial policies in the post-war era as reflected in private conversation and memoirs, that is, a rigid and doctrinaire outlook on international affairs.

Stalin, for example, is reported in the summer of 1945 at a meeting at one of his dachas as having pinned a map to the wall showing the prospective post-war frontiers. Stepping back, he pointed to the north and said that he liked what he saw. The same was true for what he found in the northwest: 'The Baltic area – Russian from time immemorial!' He then looked to the east: 'All of Sakhalin, the Kurile Islands, Port Arthur, and Dalny are ours. Well done! China, Mongolia, the Chinese Eastern Railway – all under [our] control.' Then, stabbing a finger at the southern Caucasus, he exclaimed: 'But *here* is where I don't like our frontiers!'[137]

The imperial mind-set of the supreme leader (*vozhd*) was shared by Molotov. He explained the origins of the cold war by saying, paradoxically, that the Western leaders were responsible because 'we were on the offensive' and then went on to clarify the history of the creation of the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe: 'They were, of course, bitter about us, but we had to consolidate our conquests. Create our own, socialist Germany out of a part of [the whole country]. Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, Yu-

135 Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor*, pp. 210-11.

136 Ibid., p. 211.

137 As reported by Foreign Minister Viacheslav M. Molotov, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym. Iz dnevnika F. Chueva* (Moscow: Terra, 1991), p. 14. This book essentially can be regarded as having a memoir quality. It contains the transcripts of 139 conversations (and a neighbor's remarks at Molotov's funeral) between the former Soviet foreign minister and Felix Chuev. For details about the background of the 'memoirs' and excerpts from the book see Woodford McClellan, 'Molotov Remembers', *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 1 (Spring 1992), pp. 17-20.

goslavia – they were feeble, we had to restore order everywhere.'[138] And what were the limits to such a 'restoration'? They were obviously not set by moral considerations and, in principle, unlimited. Thus, when Averell Harriman asked Stalin whether he was pleased with the fact that while earlier the Germans had been at the gates of Moscow, he was now engaged with the Western powers in an effort to divide Berlin, he replied coldly: 'Tsar Aleksandr went [all the way] to Paris.'[139] The limits of imperial consolidation and expansion, therefore, were set by expediency. This is confirmed by Molotov. 'Of course, you have to know when to stop. In this regard I think Stalin observed strict limits.'[140]

The structure of the emerging empire conformed to the ideological part of the paradigm and required close approximation of the dependencies to the Soviet system. For tactical reasons, some experimentation and deviation was allowed in East Germany and other parts of Eastern Europe, but only until about 1948.[141] From then on, the principle of 'proletarian internationalism' was to govern the relations between the Soviet Union and the satellite countries. This carried with it the sub-principle of limited sovereignty and the Soviet Union's self-proclaimed right of armed intervention when the socialist order appeared threatened. Although the latter principle, held to be separate from and superior to 'bourgeois' international law, was formally asserted only in the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia (the Brezhnev Doctrine), in practice it existed from the very beginning of the imposition of Soviet control in Eastern Europe.

One of the important issues connected with the ideological part of the paradigm concerns the issue of popular consent. Marxism-Leninism and traditional imperial exigencies again reinforced each other. The will of the people(s) in the peripheral areas is typically of little or no concern to the centre. The rationale of empire is to enhance the power and glory of the centre and to discourage and suppress processes of emancipation at the periphery. In the Soviet case, this rationale was enhanced not only by the universalist pretensions and anti-nationalist content of Marxist-Leninist ideology but also by the Leninist disdain for 'spontaneity' and 'subjectivism' as opposed to the allegedly objective requirements of history.

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138 [Molotov], *Sto sorok besed*, p. 86.
139 Ibid., p. 103.
140 Ibid.
141 Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc: Unity and Conflict*, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1961).

It is useful in this context to present some evidence from secret reports of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany about the conditions and results of Soviet policies in this strategically important outpost of empire.[142] One of these reports referred to talks between SMA officers and Prime Minister Steinhof of the *Land* Brandenburg concerning 'the attitude of the German population to the Soviet occupation powers', drawing on a 'number of materials from various districts of the Brandenburg *Land*'.[143] Despite the severe constraints on the free flow of information under Stalinism, the report was quite sanguine about popular German attitudes. It cited the *Oberbürgermeister* (chief mayor) of the city of Forst, Worter (SED), as having stated at a meeting of *Volksvertreter* (people's deputies) to the city assembly: 'We can't go on this way. The Russians only give orders, and we have to be quiet, listen and, without any complaint, carry out these orders.' These remarks by a communist party member 'were met by stormy applause' among the CDU and LDP deputies. Similarly, at a meeting in Greifenberg, the representative of the SED was reportedly verbally attacked by members of the CDU who called the communist party members 'hirelings of the Kremlin' and shouted: 'Down with the Traitors of the Fatherland!'[144]

SMA reports also accurately reflected the popular attitude to Russians and the Soviet Union. Thus, at a meeting of the FDJ (Freie Deutsche Ju-

142 The reports are to be found in the CPSU archives renamed Russian Center for the Preservation of Contemporary Documents (Tsentr khraneniia sovremennoi dokumentatsii – TsKhSD) in Moscow. This author was able freely to use see the documents in 1992. However, by the spring of 1993 usage policy in all the Russian archives had changed. Thus, when returning in that year to continue with the work, the registry (*fondy*) of documents had pencil marks next to military-security related documents to the effect that they could 'not be checked out to the reading room'.

143 'Prem'er ministr zemli Brandenburg d-r Steingof [Steinhof] ob otnoshenii nemetskogo naseleniia k sovetskim okkupatsionnym vlastam', Biuro informatsii SVA, *Biulleten'*, No. 23, 18 June 1948, Top Secret, CPSU Archives, Tsentral'nyi Komitet VKP (b), Otdel vneshnei politiki [hereafter TsK VKP] (b), Otdel vneshnei politiki], *fond* 17, *opis* 128, *ed. khr.* 579. It is unclear whether the SMA official engaged in what was typical of the Soviet period, that is, when party and government policy was to be criticized, critics refrained from doing so directly, quoting third party views instead. As the subsequent assessment of why it was 'not easy to re-educate the German people' would seem to indicate, the SMA officer most likely agreed with prime minister Steinhof's view that Soviet occupation policy in Germany was 'disastrous'.

144 Ibid.

gend, the communist youth organization) in Wittenberg, the chairman of the CDU is reported to have objected to the idea of holding a bicycle race in support of the all-German referendum on German unity (on the referendum see below). His argument was that the Russians would stop the bike riders along the way and take away their bikes: 'They are very keen on these things', was the problem. Bikes, of course, he went on to deplore, 'are not the only things the Russians take'.[145]

On the basis of such information the Soviet Military Administration lamented the fact that 'it is not easy to re-educate the German people in the spirit of friendship and respect for the Soviet Union'. In essence, it saw three reasons for this difficulty: (1) the 'anti-Soviet propaganda' before the war, which had exerted a powerful influence on popular images; (2) quoting Steinhof, a 'disastrous' occupation policy which had reinforced the prevalent negative stereotypes; and (3) skilful exploitation of SMA 'mistakes and shortcomings' by the opponents of the new order.[146]

Some background information is appropriate with respect to the second of Steinhof's observations. Even before Soviet occupation policy began to take shape, large-scale plundering and rape committed by Red Army soldiers had seriously damaged the chances of Russian-German reconciliation and the successful introduction of a Soviet-type system.[147] When the Soviet army entered East Prussia and crossed the Vistula into Silesia and Pomerania, it was common for Soviet soldiers when they entered towns and villages to rape girls and women, killing many in the process, pillage the homes for personal possessions, food, and alcohol, and leave the place in flames. They acted in conformity with Ilya Ehrenburg's calls for retribution, which were widely disseminated in the armed forces: 'We shall kill. If you have not killed at least one German a day, you have wasted that day ... If you kill one German, kill another – there is nothing funnier for us than a pile of German corpses.'[148] Since Stalin had rejected any criticism of the savage behaviour of the Soviet troops in Eastern Europe and the

145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 The account of the large-scale plundering and rape in which the Soviet soldiers engaged in the areas conquered in 1944-45 follows the detailed study by Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, pp. 69-140. Ehrenburg was active in war journalism throughout World War II.
148 Ehrenburg as quoted ibid., p. 72.

north-eastern part of Yugoslavia,[149] it was not surprising that he would respond even more negatively to complaints by East German communists. 'I will not allow anyone to drag the reputation of the Red Army in the mud', he is reported as having said.[150] The rampages and rapes committed by marauding and often drunk soldiers did not stop with the conquest of Berlin and Germany's formal surrender on 9 May. Although many Soviet officers and Stalin had come to realize even before the end of the war that letting the armed forces run berserk eroded army discipline and harmed Soviet interests in Germany, it was not until the troops were confined to strictly guarded posts and camps during the winter of 1946-47 that German women were freed from the persistent threat of rape.[151]

Lasting damage to the chances for Russian-German reconciliation and successful economic reconstruction in the Soviet zone of occupation was done also by the rapacious reparations policy discussed in the previous section. The policy went beyond the dismantling of industrial plants and the shipment of products from current production to the Soviet Union. It also included the deportation of nuclear scientists, missile engineers, and technicians. For instance, in October 1946, in a carefully planned operation code-named Osoviakhim, thousands of German scientists and technicians were rounded up and, with their families and possessions, transferred to the Soviet Union in ninety-two trains and, in special cases, in airplanes.[152] Finally, it included the requisition of forced labour. In fact, perhaps nothing can demonstrate more convincingly Stalin's determination to use German resources for strengthening Soviet power than the utilization of German labour for the extraction of uranium and, thus, for the building nuclear weapons.

Ever since the United States had tested the atom bomb and used nuclear weapons in the war against Japan, Stalin considered manufacture of Soviet equivalents a high-priority project.[153] General Leslie Groves, the chief administrator of the American nuclear weapons program, had thought at the

149 Djilas, *Conversations with Stalin*, pp. 95, 101.

150 The source for this is Wolfgang Leonhard, *Child of the Revolution* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1958), p. 365, as quoted by Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 71.

151 Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, p. 79.

152 Ibid., pp. 220-35.

153 See the carefully researched reconstruction of this top political and military priority by David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

end of the war that it would take the Soviet Union about ten years to produce an atomic bomb. He estimated that the Czech and Russian supplies of uranium constituted no more than 5 percent of the world's supply and that, as a result, even if the Soviets could produce a bomb, based on their small stores of uranium, they would never be able to keep up with Western bomb production.[154] A Russian informant confirmed Groves's assessment of the Soviet predicament when he told American intelligence that 'the biggest drawback to making a Soviet atom bomb is the tremendous lack of pure uranium available to the Soviet Union'. However, the western Erzgebirge region of Saxony, located across the mountains of the Jáchymow mines in Czechoslovakia, contained huge deposits of pitchblende, material usable for pure uranium extraction. In the first months of 1947, the entire region was cordoned off by Soviet military units, while the mining districts themselves were placed under the administration of Moscow's State Security Ministry (NKVD) and guarded by troops of the Ministry of the Interior (MVD). Within a relatively short time, the region was turned into one of the richest uranium producing areas in the world and became an almost indispensable asset for the Soviet nuclear weapons project. This was made possible only because tens of thousands of workers were forcibly recruited for work in the mines and thereby exposed to dangerous levels of radiation. The NKVD administrators were completely unresponsive to complaints noo matter whether they were voiced by ordinary citizens or East German communist party officials. In the secret police's and Stalin's view, the extraction of strategically important resources took precedence over long-term political interests. The viability and legitimacy of the East German communist regime, therefore, was subordinated to Soviet military requirements.

There was no particular need to engage in any skilful exploitation of Soviet 'mistakes and shortcomings' – the third point Steinhof had made. The policies of the Soviet occupation authorities and their East German communist collaborators themselves were sufficient. Colonel Tiul'panov, the chief of the SMA's information department, for all practical purposes confirmed this in his reports to Moscow about the Referendum on German Unity. The referendum had been decided upon by a Second People's Congress in March 1948 and was held from 23 May to 13 June 1948. The

154 Citations and the subsequent analysis according to Naimark, *The Russians in Germany*, pp. 235-36.

effectiveness of the referendum campaign could be taken as an indicator of the degree of political support for the SED in the spring of 1948 in the Western zones of occupation, the Soviet zone and in Berlin.[155]

The results in the British zone, the only Western zone where the referendum was allowed by the occupation authorities, turned out as expected. Support for the 'German unity' drive, as reported by Tiul'panov, was in the single-digit range. Not much better, as shown in Table 1, were the results in the three Western sectors of Berlin.

Table 1: Results of the May-June 1948 Referendum in Berlin

Soviet sector	681 000	79.8%
British sector	54 000	12.2%
American sector	48 000	6.6%
French sector	34 000	10.3%

In contrast, the results in the Soviet sector were extremely encouraging from the SMA's and the SED's point of view: A total of 681 000 voters (out of an estimated total population of 1.1 million of the Soviet sector) had shown up, and 79.8 percent of those had supported the unity drive. Tiul'panov, however, knew and reported the actual state of affairs in Berlin. The referendum had revealed that a 'significant part of the population' was negatively disposed towards the Soviet occupation power and the SED. There 'appeared to be a lack of influence of the FDJ on broad segments of the youth'. When propagating the referendum, communist party workers had been told: 'We are all for unity. You don't need to persuade us. *Let the Russians pack up and leave, and we'll have unity immediately.*'[156]

The chief of the SMA's information department was also suspicious about the high percentage of signatures in the Soviet zone of occupation. The results contradicted reality. He candidly described the 'negative attitude among certain segments of the population towards the Soviet occupation powers, the SED, and the democratic camp'. Such attitudes, he thought, could be observed especially among 'the refugees, church organizations and the religious denominations'. The Protestant Church, in partic-

155 SMAG, Department of Information, Report by Colonel Tiul'panov, chief of the information department, to Comrade Baranov, CPSU Central Committee, 12 May 1948, CPSU Archives, Otdel vneshnei politiki, *fond* 17, *opis* 128, *ed. khr.* 568.

156 Ibid. (italics mine).

ular, was regarded by him as being able to play an important role in shaping popular perceptions. Finally, Tiul'panov pointed to the expulsion of Germans from their homeland in the east – 'ethnic cleansing' as one would say today – as posing serious problems for the occupation authorities. He quoted one of the refugees from East Prussia as saying: 'We refugees would vote for the unity of Germany if the referendum question would say that the borders of Germany will be moved to the east.'[157]

Despite the candour, even Tiul'panov remained captive to traditional Bolshevik misperceptions or perhaps, contrary to better judgment, considered it expedient to adhere to them in his reports to Moscow. He, too, constructed unconvincing rationalizations, advocated unworkable remedies and engaged in what German critics have called *parteichinesisch* (party political jargon or gibberish). True to standard Marxist-Leninist and Stalinist rhetoric, he tried to convince his superiors that, despite all the attitudes of German youth, the refugees and the *petite bourgeoisie*, 'the referendum was supported by the working class and peasantry'.[158] In other reports he even suggested that not all was lost in the relationship with German social democracy. Adopting a traditional Leninist approach, he detected a 'growing rift between the provocative, anti-Soviet course of the leadership of the SPD and the rank and file' of the party. He also reassuringly sensed a schism between the followers of Kurt Schumacher (one of the SPD leaders firmly committed to a Western orientation), the '*Shumakherovtsy*', as he called them, and the party base.[159] Irrespective of the glaring deficiencies of the Soviet system, the deep inter-war rift between German social democracy and communism Russian style as well as the behaviour of the Soviet forces after the war, the comforting notion was being conveyed to Moscow that the strategic line on Germany was sound and that what was needed was simply to correct 'tactical' mistakes, errors and shortcomings, 'improve party political work' and 'strengthen organizational activity'. One of the pieces of advice of the SMA correspondingly reads: 'The Central Committee of the SED must work out a clear ideological platform for work with the social democrats and take organizational measures that will ensure the mobilization of regional and lower echelons of the SED for this work.'[160]

157 Ibid.
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.

The SMA expressed similarly utopian views on the CDU, its 'conservative' party creation in the Soviet zone. Under the erroneous assumption that the 'pro-American' and 'anti-democratic line' of the adherents of party leader Jakob Kaiser, the *Kaizerovtsy*, had been defeated, the eastern CDU was now considered to be 'in a position to act as a wedge that can begin to loosen the front of Christian Democratic parties in West Germany and perhaps, in the future, in other European Christian Democratic Parties as well'.[161]

Finally, SMA portrayals of the economic state of affairs were characterized by the same wishful thinking characteristic of such political reports. In conformity with the Ideological and Imperial paradigm, emphasis was put on the 'correctness' of the main strategic line and the 'progress' made in its implementation. Only some 'temporary' or 'transitory' problems had to be overcome. One report reassured the imperial centre that 'The achievements in industrial work in 1947 provide the basis for stating that the economy of the Soviet Zone is developing on a correct path; the public sector is preeminent, and the private sector is losing its commanding position.'[162] But another report revealed that not everything was well at the periphery. 'The supply of the population of the Soviet zone of occupation in several *Länder*', it stated, even though 'not catastrophic', had nevertheless 'significantly deteriorated'.[163]

These glimpses into the day-to-day problems of the administration of empire and the kind of reporting provided to the centre confirm the validity of the present working hypothesis: the division of Germany occurred not by design but by default. The partition was determined by the require-

161 SMAG, Department of Information, Report by Colonel Tiul'panov, chief of the information department, to Comrade Baranov, CPSU Central Committee, 'Polozhenie v Khristianstvo-Demokraticheskom Soiuze Sovetskoi zony okkupatsii i Berlina', 23 April 1948, Secret, CPSU Archives, Otdel vneshnei politiki, *fond* 17, *opis* 128, *ed. khr.* 568.

162 Report by V. Semenov [political counselor at the SMAG] and G. Arkad'ev [his deputy] to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Comrade V.M. Molotov; Secretary of the CPSU Central Committee, M.A. Suslov; and Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, A. Ia. Vyshshinskii, Secret, 'Kratkii ekonomicheskii obzor po sovetskoi zone okupatsii Germanii', 27 March 1948, CPSU Archives, Otdel vneshnei politiki, *fond 17*, *opis* 128, *ed. khr.* 573.

163 SMAG, Information Bureau, 'K voprosu o prodovol'stvennom polozhenii v Sovetskoi zone', *Biulleten'*, No. 32, August 1948, pp. 1-10, CPSU Archives, Otdel vneshnei politiki, *fond* 17, *opis* 128, *ed. khr*. 578.

ments of a narrowly circumscribed paradigm, and once the division of Germany had become a *fait accompli*, it was maintained by bureaucratic inertia.

Since bureaucrats are the agents of inertia, some words are in order about the *personnel* responsible for both policy formulation and implementation. One of the features characteristic for imperial appointments, such as the satraps in Persia or the provincial governors in the Roman empire, is the fact that officials are often sent abroad to distant and undesirable provinces as punishment for mistakes or failures or, if dispatched to more important and desirable places, as a reward for faithful service. Typically, the officials' ability to impose the will of the centre, rather than their special knowledge of or sensitivity to local conditions, is the primary criterion for their appointment abroad. This also applied to Soviet practices in Eastern Europe. Former SMA political advisor Semenov, for instance, in a matter of fact reported that Stalin 'transferred the operational work [i.e. everyday business] of the SMA to the Chief of the Political Department of the Fifth Shock Army, General Fedor Efimovich Bokov'. Why? Stalin had known Bokov 'since the beginning of the war, when he was a secretary in the party committee of the General Staff of the Red Army. He had at times reported to Stalin and he [Stalin had] liked him. He always had his hands at the seams of his trousers, no redundant words, let alone demands.'[164] What about Bokov's special qualifications for the assignment to Germany? None whatsoever. 'His most important shortcoming was surely that he didn't know Germany and that he was also unwilling to immerse himself in its problems.'[165]

Another feature of Soviet control consisted in the fact that, as Shevardnadze knew well when he assumed office as foreign minister, that 'top *party officials* were appointed to ambassadorial posts in Eastern Europe, and those appointments were made exclusively by the Politburo'. Their subordination to the party leadership in Moscow determined the way decisions were made: 'Former party officials appealed to higher party levels in all questions, bypassing the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. And in the countries where they were posted they would often act in a similar way, going

164 According to Semenov, this is how staff officers described him in their memoirs; Semjonow, *Von Stalin bis Gorbatschow*, p. 222.

165 Ibid., p. 224.

directly to the top and ignoring the foreign ministries of the host country.'[166]

Centralization of decision making contributed to this closed system of imperial personnel selection and control. Information passed upward in the decision-making hierarchy, with several drafts working their way up to the top through formalized resolutions of the Central Committee of the CPSU and the Council of Ministers of the USSR. The most important decisions ultimately had to be approved by Stalin personally or, after his death, 'collectively' in the Politburo. Once a decision was made, the principle of 'democratic centralism' provided that there should be no further discussion and no 'factionalism' in the party organs and state institutions but strict implementation in accordance with the letter and spirit of the decision. As for decision-making on the German problem, Semenov aptly observed that

> Stalin personally kept German matters in his hands. In accordance with [his] orders, Vyacheslav Molotov dealt with them in the Politburo of the CC ... Policy questions and important operational actions would regularly be discussed in meetings with Stalin. From the German side, Wilhelm Pieck, Otto Grotewohl, and Walter Ulbricht would be present. The Soviet participants as a rule were Stalin, Molotov as well as, from the SMA, Vasili Sokolovsky [the head of the Soviet Military Administration in Germany] and I [Semenov]. [Marshal Georgi K.] Zhukov [the supreme commander of the Soviet forces in Germany] settled many questions directly with Stalin [from headquarters in Berlin] and was seldom called to the discussions in Moscow.[167]

After having provided the basic reasons why the division of Germany occurred, examined the conceptual frame of reference and the mind-set of the top decision-makers as well as described the ineptitude of the subordinates supporting the establishment of empire, it is now appropriate to focus on some of the most important milestones in the hardening of the division, as well as on those instances that seemed to indicate that the Soviet leadership was perhaps reconsidering the risks, costs and benefits of its position in Germany.

166 Shevardnadze, *Moi vybor*, pp. 194-95.
167 Ibid., pp. 230-31.

4. The Impact of the Berlin Blockade and the Korean War

One of the milestones on the road to the division of Germany and a watershed of European history is the Berlin blockade of 1948-49. The main analytical problem that this ill-advised Soviet venture poses is whether it was meant to be a *lever* with which to impede the Western processes for the formation of a separate West German state and prevent the door from being firmly shut on German political and economic unity, or whether Berlin was the *prize* of the endeavour, with the city to be merged with the Soviet zone of occupation in an effort to consolidate the Soviet empire. There is evidence for both interpretations.[168]

Evidence for the lever theory of the Berlin blockade and the Soviet preference for maintaining German political and economic unity can be found in the letter by the chief of the SMAG, Marshal V.D. Sokolovsky, to his British counterpart, General Robertson. On 29 June 1948, eleven days after the promulgation of the currency reform in the Western zones and the beginning of the blockade as a response, Sokolovsky wrote: 'I would like to assure you that your opinion regarding the restrictions of movements of the German population is correct'; they are of a 'temporary nature and taken *for the protection of the currency* of the Soviet zone'.[169] Later Soviet sources, such as the authoritative *Short History of the USSR*, summed up the currency argument as follows:

> On 20 June 1948 [18 June is the correct date] a secretly prepared money reform was suddenly announced in the three Western Zones. The devalued old German marks instantly flooded Eastern Germany, creating a danger to its economy. The Soviet occupation authorities were compelled to take urgent measures. To block off currency profiteers all vehicles and passengers arriving from Western Germany were thoroughly checked.[170]

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168 See also in detail Adomeit, *Soviet Risk Taking and Crisis Behavior*, the chapter on the origins, course of events and consequences of the Berlin crisis of 1948, pp. 67-182.

169 *Pravda*, 1 July 1948 (italics mine); for the economic interpretation, see also Marshal Sokolovsky's letters to the American military governor in Germany, General Lucius D. Clay, of 20 and 22 June 1948, *Pravda*, 22 and 23 June 1948.

170 Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Institute of History , ed., *A Short History of the USSR, Part II* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1965), p. 274. For the economic justification of the blockade, see also V.G. Trukhanovskii, ed., *Istoriia mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR, Vol. III: 1945-1963* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo "Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia," 1964), p. 221.

The currency issue was put into a broader economic context. In late 1947, as the former US Secretary of State, Byrnes, recalls, Molotov responded to a question about the 'real Soviet motives in Europe' that he (Molotov) 'was willing to give up practically anything else' in order to get a quadripartite arrangement on the Ruhr.[171] During the Berlin crisis, half a year later, the Soviet government returned to this issue in its note of 14 July to the Western powers, complaining that 'such a very important centre of German military industry as the Ruhr district has been removed from the control of the four powers'.[172] In discussions with the three Western ambassadors, held from 2 to 30 August 1948 in Moscow, Stalin and Molotov also mentioned the Ruhr repeatedly.[173]

Political and economic objectives were inextricably linked. Thus, the communiqué of the Foreign Ministers' Conference of the Soviet Union, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary, held from 23 to 24 June 1948 in Warsaw, touched upon economic issues but went on to deplore the Western allies' policy toward Germany as expressed in the London agreement of 7 June. By their announced plans for the merger of the three Western zones and the projected creation of a separate West German state, the communiqué stated, the United States, Britain, and France had 'complete[d] the division and dismemberment of Germany'; they had 'encourage[d] German revanchist elements' and 'subordinate[d] the economy of Western Germany to the aims of the USA and Britain'; they had acted in an 'anti-democratic spirit'; and, last but not least, they had committed a 'gross violation of the Yalta and Potsdam agreements'.[174]

Political issues ostensibly designed to maintain German unity were also advanced by Marshal Sokolovsky at the conference of the four military governors near Potsdam on 3 July. He stated tersely that the traffic restrictions would continue until the Western allies 'abandoned [their] plans for a West German government'.[175] Similarly, in their discussions with the three

171 Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), p. 347.
172 *Pravda*, 16 July 1948.
173 According to Charles E. Bohlen, State Department Counsellor at that time, as quoted in Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries*, p. 347.
174 Statement of the Foreign Ministers of the USSR, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, and Hungary, *Pravda*, 25 June 1948.
175 Lucius D. Clay, *Decision in Germany* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1950), p. 367.

Western ambassadors in August, Stalin and Molotov reaffirmed the point made in the Soviet note of 14 July to the effect that the conversations regarding Berlin were of 'no useful purpose except within the framework of conversations regarding all of Germany'.[176] According to the account by Walter Bedell Smith, the United States ambassador to the Soviet Union and a participant in the Moscow discussions, Stalin made it clear 'in no uncertain terms' that the Western powers had 'forfeited their right to occupy Berlin' by their introduction of a new currency in Berlin and by their 'decision to set up a Western German government at Frankfurt'.[177] Smith also thought that 'we could have produced an agreement in fifteen minutes at any time by an offer to abandon the London decisions'.[178]

However, the interpretation of the Soviet blockade as having been imposed for the purpose of gaining Berlin as a *prize* can be made equally persuasive. The SMA stridently maintained that Greater Berlin 'lies in the Soviet zone of occupation' and 'economically forms part of it'. It added that the 'whole mechanism of joint administration' of Berlin and Germany had collapsed and 'with it any legitimate basis for the continued presence of the American, British, and French authorities in Berlin'. It then arrived at the *ultima ratio* of the argument, declaring that 'the Soviet Military Administration is the only legitimate occupation authority [in Berlin]. As a consequence its orders have the force of law for the whole of Berlin'.[179] Such statements clearly implied that Berlin was to be incorporated into the Soviet zone of occupation. Alexander Werth, a former British war correspondent, accordingly wrote that, 'having accepted the *fait accompli* of a separate Western Germany, the Russians tried to put an end to the Berlin "anomaly" with their 1948 blockade of the former Reich capital'.[180]

Faced with the persuasiveness of both interpretations, a Western scholar has argued that, from the Soviet point of view, Berlin was both, a lever *and* a prize."[181] This argument is close to this author's conclusions. Stalin simply had not made up his mind as to what would result from the pres-

176 Walter Bedell Smith, *My Three Years in Moscow* (Philadelphia, Pa: Lippincott, 1950), p. 241.
177 Ibid., p. 244.
178 W.B. Smith, *My Three Years in Moscow*, p. 253.
179 *Tägliche Rundschau* (SMAG newspaper), 24 June 1948.
180 Alexander Werth, *Russia, the Post-War Years* (London: Robert Hale, 1971), p. 248.
181 Walter Phillips Davison, *The Berlin Blockade: A Study in Cold War Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1958), p. 144 (italics mine).

sure tactics. Western analysts of Soviet foreign policy have often sought to identify a single objective underlying Soviet foreign policy initiatives and failed to neglect the possibility that the Soviet leaders may have pursued several goals simultaneously, or were simply testing what could be achieved. This *modus operandi* seems to have applied in the Berlin crisis. Advantageous outcomes, from Stalin's viewpoint, could either have been the Western abandonment of the London recommendations for the foundation of a separate West German state or a withdrawal of the Western allies from Berlin. Yet both of these objectives were unacceptable to the Western powers. This, together with the ambiguity of the Soviet stance, accounted for the resounding failure of Stalin's risky venture. The constant fluctuation between narrow objectives (incorporation of Berlin in the Soviet zone) and larger goals (maintaining German unity), interspersed with the absurd assertion that the blockade essentially was a figment of Western imagination since there existed only 'technical difficulties' on the roads, railways and canals to and from Berlin. This led to confusion among Western diplomats as to what Stalin really wanted and whether compromise on any of the German issues was feasible.

What, then, were the immediate consequences of Stalin's initiative and their impact on subsequent Soviet policies on the German problem?

First and foremost, the blockade, far from arresting the momentum toward the foundation of the Federal Republic, actually served to accelerate it. This step was followed by the establishment of a German Democratic Republic: on 30 May 1949, a People's Congress (*Volkskongress*) adopted a draft constitution and, with Soviet 'consent', constituted itself as the GDR's parliament (*Volkskammer*). The corresponding constitution was duly adopted on 7 October 1949, and on the same day the parliament authorized SED leader Otto Grotewohl to form a provisional government.[182] These measures, however, did not terminate the imperial nature of the relationship between the USSR and the GDR. The transfer of sovereignty was limited, and this was clearly indicated by a name change: the Soviet Military Administration in Germany turned into the Soviet Control Commission in Germany. As General Chuikov, the head of the SCCG clarified, the task of this body was to watch over the implementation of the Potsdam

182 Renata Fritsch-Bournazel, *Die Sowjetunion und die deutsche Teilung: Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1979* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1979), pp. 39-41.

Protocol and other Four Power agreements.[183] Furthermore, the East German constitution did not mention the division of Germany. According to its preamble, 'the German people' had given itself a constitution, and in Article 1 it referred to Germany as 'an indivisible [sic] democratic republic'. The limited transfer of sovereignty to the GDR and the constitutional constructs of this entity clearly pointed to Soviet intentions to maintain control in its part of Germany and simultaneously to extend its influence through the GDR and residual Four Power mechanisms to West German affairs.

Consolidation of the empire also meant the drawing of new borders. On the occasion of a visit to Poland, SED leader Walter Ulbricht committed the GDR to the 'recognition of the Oder-Neisse line as a border of peace'.[184] This commitment was honoured and formalized in 1950 in the East German-Polish treaty of Görlitz. But the question was as yet undecided as to whether the new state with its limitations on sovereignty, new borders contested by West Germany and a regime detested by the East German population were constructs that could endure.

The impact of the failed Berlin venture was reinforced by that of the Korean war of 1950-52. The division of Korea, like that of Germany, can serve to reinforce the conclusions about the compelling nature of the Ideological and Imperial paradigm for policy-making. The archival evidence suggests that Stalin's ideas about Korea were in no way more defined and refined than those on Germany.[185] Publicly, both the Soviet and the North Korean communists adhered to the idea of a unified government for Korea – not, however, because Stalin purposefully aimed at the reestablishment of a single country but, as a Soviet foreign ministry background report written by Jakob Malik openly declared, because *'it would be politically inexpedient for the Soviet Union to oppose the creation of a single Korean government'*.[186] The vehicle that permitted Stalin to assert imperial inter-

183 Chuikov statement of 11 November 1949, *Neue Welt* (East Berlin), No. 19 (1949), pp. 4-5.

184 *Neues Deutschland*, 21 November 1948.

185 The argument and evidence presented follow Kathryn Weathersby, 'Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-1950', Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Working Paper No. 8, November 1993.

186 Jakob Malik, On the Question of a Single Government for Korea, 10 December 1945, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond* 0102, *opis* 1, *delo* 15, *papka* 1, 1.8-10, as quoted by Weathersby, 'Soviet Aims in Korea', p. 14 (italics mine). –

ests in Korea and that caused the division of Korea were the decisions of the Moscow foreign ministers' conference of December 1945. These stipulated a four-power 'trusteeship' for Korea with a joint Soviet-American commission to prepare elections for a Korean provisional government. The Soviet delegation to the talks was instructed that it should support only those political groups that accepted Moscow's position. Since only the communist party in both halves of Korea supported the 'trusteeship' idea and the Soviet delegation held firm to its instructions, the commission's work and the chances for a single Korea ended in May 1946. This did nothing to lessen Soviet verbal support for Korean reunification.

As in Germany, narrowly defined military and economic interests governed a process that led to the partition of Korea. Another internal foreign ministry report bluntly asserted that Cheju Island and the ports of Pusan and Inchon 'must be controlled by the Soviet military command. By insisting on the allocation of the strategic regions in Korea to the USSR, we can exert pressure on the position of the Americans, using their wish to receive for themselves strategic regions in the Pacific Ocean.'[187]

There were also strong parallels between Korea and Germany on economic issues. For the Soviet foreign ministry, it went without saying that 'the Japanese enterprises of military and heavy industry located in North Korea must be considered trophies of the Red Army'.[188] But the economic interests went further and were linked again with strategic interests in the form of a mineral called monazite, black sand that contains small amounts of thorium, a radioactive material that can be used in the production of nuclear weapons. From the very beginning of the occupation, Soviet officials investigated the exploitation of monazite deposits, and samples were

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Malik was Soviet ambassador to the United Nations from 1948 to 1952. At the time when the UN Security Council Resolution 82 authorizing peace enforcement action in Korea was put to a vote on 25 June 1950, he boycotted the presence of the Nationalist Chinese representative. His absence enabled the resolution to pass unanimously.

187 Notes on the Question of Former Japanese Colonies and Mandated Territories, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond* 0431, *opis* 1, *delo* 52, *papka* 8, 1.40-43, as quoted by Weathersby, 'Soviet Aims in Korea', p. 10.

188 Report by Suzdalev, senior advisor to the foreign ministry's 2nd Far Eastern Department, December 1945, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond* 0102, *opis* 1, *delo* 15, *papka* 1, 1.22-29, as quoted ibid., p. 15.

brought to the USSR.[189] In full realization of the strategic importance of these minerals, the highest-ranking Soviet officer in Korea, General Terenti Shtykov, wrote to Stalin that he considered it 'necessary to take measures to increase the export from North Korea to the USSR of concentrates of monazite, tantalum, and niobium and to begin the export of uranium ore. For this purpose I ask your orders to corresponding Soviet organizations about aiding the Korean government in the development of deposits and in the organization of the extraction of concentrate and the mining of the above indicated rare metals.'[190]

The parallels between Germany and Korea extend to perceptions of risks and costs, rather than respect for principles of self-determination, as governing the limits of Soviet imperial expansion. The documentary evidence proves that it was the highly nationalistic North Korean communists under Kim Il-Sung who were determined to establish control over the whole country by military means; that Stalin initially opposed the idea because he was concerned about American power in the Pacific region and the risks of US intervention; but that, in January 1950, he endorsed the North Korean invasion plans and aided the military push to the south after the 'correlation of forces' had seemingly shifted in favour of the socialist world system (anti-colonial uprisings in Indonesia and Indochina, guerrilla wars in Burma, Malaya, and the Philippines, unrest in the British and French territories in North Africa and the Middle East, the abolition of the US nuclear monopoly in August 1949, and the victory of the Chinese communists in October 1949) and after Mao Tse-tung had committed himself to assist Kim Il-Sung if, contrary to expectations, the United States were to intervene.[191]

As in the Berlin blockade, Stalin miscalculated likely United States reactions in Korea and had to pay a heavy price. The combined effect of both failed ventures was that Washington committed itself to a large security role not only in Asia but also in Europe. Thus, even before the end of the Berlin blockade, the North Atlantic Treaty was signed. Rather than

189 General [Terentii F.] Shtykov to Stalin, 12 March 1949, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond* 07, *opis* 22a, *delo* 223, *papka* 14, 1.1-2, as quoted ibid., p. 21.

190 Ibid.

191 See the full documentation of the deliberations between Stalin, Mao Tse-tung and Kim Il-Sung in the compendium 'The Cold War in Asia', Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, D.C., *Cold War International History Project Bulletin,* Nos. 6-7 (Winter 1995/96).

continuing to dismantle its military bases and 'bringing the boys home', the United States reintroduced large forces to the European continent. Whereas, at the outbreak of the Berlin crisis in June 1948, the US army in Europe had consisted of only 90 000 officers and men, by 1953 this number had risen to 427, 000 troops, most of whom stationed in Germany. A huge network of bases and supply depots was constructed for the American forces in Germany, Britain, France, and the Mediterranean countries and later extended to the Near and Middle East, South East Asia, and the Pacific. American strategists were, in Moscow's perspective, aiming at 'closing the circle of air bases around Russia' and making that circle 'smaller and smaller, tighter and tighter, until the Russians are throttled'. They were allegedly planning 'combined air, naval and ground operations from American bases located near the Russian mainland and their use for intensive bombing raids and attacks by guided missiles'.[192]

The obvious Soviet concern now was the possibility that West Germany's manpower, and its economic and military potential, would be added to American economic and technological resources, maritime supremacy, conventional forces, and nuclear weapons in Europe, and that the United States would use West Germany as a 'springboard for aggression' against the Soviet Union. Such concerns were fuelled by the possibility that a rearmed West Germany would be intent on 'taking revenge' and. With the help of U.S. military, try to regain lost territories in the east. The North Atlantic Treaty, therefore, was interpreted in Moscow as a dangerous scheme that 'absolutely ignores the possibility of a repetition of German aggression'. The Brussels treaty on the foundation of NATO had to be 'regarded as directed against the USSR, one of the chief allies of the United States, Great Britain, and France in the last war'.[193] Even though the Soviet Union had succeeded in exploding a nuclear device in August 1949 and tested a hydrogen bomb four years later, it lacked the kind of intercontinental delivery systems to put America at risk. The United States, in essence, remained strategically invulnerable. It enjoyed unchallenged naval supremacy in the Atlantic and the Pacific. It also possessed vastly

192 Quoted from a formal protest by the Soviet embassy in Washington in reference to a speech by General Kenney, commander of the Strategic Air Command, and an article based on it in *Newsweek;* text as published in Department of State, *Foreign Relations, 1948*, Vol. 4, p. 887.

193 Memorandum issued by the Soviet government on 31 March 1949 in reaction to the impending conclusion of the North Atlantic Treaty; *Pravda*, 1 April 1949.

superior scientific-technological and economic resources. In fact, until the late 1950s it remained the only superpower, both economically and militarily.

In the light of such unfavourable trends in the 'correlation of forces' and the existence of various plans for the rearmament of West Germany and her inclusion in a European Defense Community (EDC), initiatives appeared to be called for in Moscow to prevent, or at least delay, such a development. Stalin's note of 10 March 1952 can be interpreted as such an initiative.

5. Stalin's 1952 'Peace Note': Lost Opportunity or Political Manoeuvre?

The diplomatic note to the United States, Britain and France dropped the previous Soviet insistence on a disarmed Germany and raised the prospect of both unification and free elections. A German peace conference was to be convened with participation of an all-German government 'expressing the will of the German people'. Unification was offered in exchange for neutralization. A unified Germany would not be allowed to enter any coalition or military alliance directed against the Soviet Union. Its territory would be devoid of foreign troops and foreign military bases. The size and weaponry of its armed forces, as well as arms production, would be strictly limited. And it would be prohibited from harbouring 'organizations hostile to democracy and the cause of maintaining peace'.[194]

Controversy has raged for several decades as to the meaning of the note and the subsequent exchanges between the USSR and the Western powers. One interpretation has been that of a genuine offer and 'lost opportunity' for the reestablishment of German unity. Soviet propagandists and government officials advocated this point of view, some styling West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer as the chief culprit in the rejection of the Soviet proposal and asserting that he was 'not only a political opponent of Russia but even felt irrational hate towards the Russians'.[195] West German

194 Text of the note as published in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954*, Vol. 7, pp. 167-172.

195 Semjonow, *Von Stalin bis Gorbatschow*, p. 269. Semenov failed to provide detail on the origins, main protagonists, processes and reasoning behind the 1952 'peace note'. One suspects that the reason for this is that he would not have been able to make a convincing case for his assertion that the offer was genuine.

social democrats have accused the CDU of having squandered German unity because of its preference for Western integration. Western scholars, too, have argued this case, one of its strongest advocates being Rolf Steininger.[196]

Prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union and East Germany, the evidence adduced to support the notion of a genuine Soviet reunification offer in his and other Western studies had to be derived from Western archival sources. Such sources, however, could not help in the reconstruction of the rationale and reasons for the Soviet proposal. They failed to shed light on Soviet decision-making processes. After the collapse of communism, it became possible to conduct research using Soviet and East German archival materials. The archival evidence strongly suggests that the diplomatic note and its sequels were a *tactical* device designed to achieve some or all of the following objectives: to gain a greater degree of influence over West German public opinion; to counteract then current Western initiatives on 'free elections' to be held in both parts of Germany under United Nations supervision; to delay or prevent West German defense integration in the framework of the European Defense Community; and to obtain a gradual pullout of Western allied troops from West Germany.[197]

The following direct and circumstantial evidence justifies this conclusion. First, the manipulative and instrumental character of the initiative

196 Rolf Steininger, *Eine vertane Chance: Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 und die Wiedervereinigung* (Bonn: Dietz, 1985).

197 The most thorough of the new studies is Gerhard Wettig, 'Die Deutschland-Note vom 10. März 1952 auf der Basis diplomatischer Akten des russischen Außenministeriums', *Deutschland Archiv*, No. 7 (June 1993), pp. 786-805. Wettig's conclusions essentially are shared by Ruud van Dijk, 'The 1952 Stalin Note Debate: Myth or Missed Opportunity?', Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Working Paper, No. 14, May 1996. – Willfriede Otto, 'Sowjetische Deutschlandnote 1952: Stalin und die DDR. Bisher unveröffentlichte handschriftliche Notizen Wilhelm Piecks', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung* (March 1991), pp. 374-81. The account by Otto is based on handwritten notes taken by Wilhelm Pieck, the East German president. – On the basis of many of the same sources, however, Wilfried Loth, *Die Sowjetunion und die deutsche Frage: Studien zur sowjetischen Deutschlandpolitik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), arrives at different conclusions. For a summary of Loth's studies and arguments see the book review by Rolf Badstübner, 'W. Loth: Die Sowjetunion und die deutsche Frage', <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=22097>.

was clearly stated by its chief architects in the course of its preparation. The 'peace note', according to comments sent by then deputy Foreign Minister Gromyko to Stalin, 'would have great political meaning for the strengthening of the struggle for peace and against the remilitarization of West Germany and would help the supporters of the unity of Germany and peace to expose the aggressive intentions of the three Western powers connected with the General Treaty [on the transfer of sovereignty to West Germany]'.[198]

Second, the manipulative and propagandist quality of the note is apparent also in the fact that the initiative was not quietly discussed among Soviet and Western diplomats but published immediately for maximum political impact. The new evidence clarifies that this purpose was uppermost in the minds of Soviet officials who participated in drafting the note. In full realization of the lack of support for the communist party in West Germany (KPD), the party's grave organizational weaknesses, and the 'absence of correct and flexible tactics',[199] an appeal was to be made to the proverbial 'masses'. Suitable respondents would be found among the many, allegedly disgruntled, rank and file social democrats and in the 'oppositional bourgeoisie'.[200] The publication of the note, as Soviet and East German leaders incongruously agreed, had 'triggered a great movement of the masses' and this had 'put the Western powers and the Adenauer government under considerable pressure'. They even entertained the (utterly unrealistic) notion that the 'question of elections without a UN Commission' could be transformed into a 'mass struggle for toppling the Adenauer government'.[201]

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198 A. Gromyko to I. Stalin, 21 January 1952, Archiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii (hereafter AVPRF), 07, 25, 100, 13, A-124/ag (supplement), as quoted by Wettig, 'Die Deutschland-Note', p. 799. The sequence of numbers and letters follows the Soviet archival classification system in the following order: *fond, opis, delo,* and *papka*. The last letters and numbers refer to the specific document on file.

199 From a report of 15 March 1952 of the head of the diplomatic mission of the USSR in the GDR, G.M. Pushkin, sent to the Soviet foreign ministry: 'Ekonomicheskii i politicheskii obzor polozheniia Zapadnoi Germanii v 1951 godu', 15 March 1952, AVPRF, 82, 40, 042-Ge/2, 254, E-1248/A-675/3, as quoted by Wettig, 'Die Deutschland-Note', pp. 801-2.

200 Ibid.

201 Based on notes taken by GDR president Wilhelm Pieck on the occasion of the talks held with Stalin on 1 and 7 April 1952, Otto, 'Sowjetische Deutschland-Note', pp. 382-83. They do not clarify who exactly made these points and gave

A third important aspect of the Soviet initiative that casts doubt on the 'lost opportunity' interpretation is the fact that the preparation of the note did not occur in secrecy and over the heads of the East German communists, who would have been the victims of unification, but with their full knowledge and active participation. It is difficult to see why the SED should have joined the project if it had harboured suspicions that it was being invited to provide helpful suggestions for its self-liquidation.

Fourth, the new evidence not only fails to provide support for the argument that Stalin had decided to liquidate East Germany but, on the contrary, shows that he was determined to strengthen its 'socialist foundations'. The details of this objective were discussed in meetings between Walter Ulbricht, Wilhelm Pieck and Otto Grotewohl of the SED leadership and Stalin and other top Soviet officials in Moscow from 31 March until 10 April. The discussion included plans for the replacement along Soviet lines of the traditional *Länder* structure of East German by smaller administrative districts (*Bezirke)*; an expansion of the state and collective sector in agriculture; organizational streamlining of the SED as a 'party of a new type'; border protection measures between East and West Germany; and the build-up of national armed forces in the GDR.[202]

Fifth, the enhanced efforts to consolidate socialism in the GDR coincided with determined Soviet attempts at tightening bloc discipline. Starting in September 1949 in Hungary with the arrest, trial and later execution by garrotting of Laszlo Rajk (a Politburo member and the minister of the interior), purges began to take place throughout Eastern Europe, the most extensive of which occurring in Czechoslovakia, reaching its zenith in November 1951 with the arrest and later trial and execution of Rudolf Slansky, a deputy prime minister and former party secretary.[203] Deconstructing the socialist foundations in the GDR for the sake of a united neutral Germany simply would not have fit the overall pattern of imperial construction.

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the appropriate instructions, Ulbricht or Stalin. The difference is largely immaterial since, as argued here, no major divergence in Soviet and East German viewpoints can be detected.

202 Based on notes taken by Pieck according to Otto, 'Sowjetische Deutschland-Note', pp. 388-89, and documents from the Soviet foreign ministry archives, A. Gromyko to A. Vyshinskii, 18 April 1952, AVPRF, 07, 27, 162, 42, E-3347/r., as quoted by Wettig, 'Die Deutschland-Note', pp. 802-3.

203 Brzezinski, *The Soviet Bloc*, pp. 93-94.

A sixth rationale concerns Soviet domestic politics. A genuine Soviet reunification offer, as argued, would have meant a significant change in established policies. This, in turn, would have been reflected in a shift in internal power alignments. However, the note was carefully prepared and continuously 'improved' in accordance with routine bureaucratic procedures and decision-making processes. The idea of a note was apparently first suggested to Gromyko by Mikhail Gribanov, the head of the MFA's Third European Department. What was needed, he told his superior, was 'a real step to a peaceful settlement with Germany ... in order to counteract the erroneous declaration of the three [Western] powers on the termination of the state of war with Germany.'[204] For that purpose, he proposed convening a commission of experts that would draft principles for a German peace treaty.[205] He also suggested to Foreign Minister Andrei Vyshinsky in the same month that the GDR should first propose to West Germany a joint initiative urging the four powers to conclude a peace treaty with Germany. After the expected rejection of this *démarche* by Bonn, the East German government should then unilaterally address the four powers. Only thereafter would Moscow launch corresponding initiatives.[206] The first draft of the principles of a peace treaty was sent by Gribanov to the commission of experts on 8 September 1951. In the subsequent months, Molotov, who at the time dealt with foreign policy matters in the Politburo, and Gromyko were actively involved in modifying and commenting on the draft. On three occasions it was sent to Stalin for final approval.[207] No evidence has come to light to the effect that disagreements existed among the top leaders or the major institutions involved in decision-making either on substance or procedure. There is also no evidence showing that a pro-German faction in the foreign ministry or the Politburo had suddenly become ascendant and been able to embark on a drastic departure from the traditional paradigm.

This leads to a seventh point in the rebuttal of the 'genuine offer' thesis. One would expect that major changes on an issue as crucial as that of Germany would not only be reflected in domestic political changes but also be

204 M. Gribanov to A. A. Gromyko, 3 August 1951, AVPRF, 082, 38, 112, 250, A-1475/Zeo, as quoted by Wettig, 'Die Deutschland-Note', p. 792.
205 Ibid.
206 M. Gribanov to A. Ia. Vyshinsksii, 15 August 1951, AVPRF, 082, 38, 112, 250, A-1558/Zeo, as quoted by Wettig, 'Die Deutschland-Note', p. 793.
207 Ibid., p. 798.

embedded in an overall change of Soviet ideology, domestic politics and foreign policy. This, however, was not the case. Concerning ideology, while Soviet foreign ministry officials and diplomats were busy drafting, promulgating and propagandizing the 'peace note', party officials immersed themselves in the task of preparing the Nineteenth Party Congress, to be held in October 1952. Their primary business centred on domestic affairs – the new party statutes, the Fifth Five-Year Plan, the necessity for priority development of heavy industry, and the intensification of the struggle against slackness and corruption in the economic bureaucracy. These topics reappeared in a collection of comments published in *Bolshevik, Pravda*, and in tens of millions of pamphlet reprints under the title of *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, written in February, April, May and September 1952.[208] One would search in vain in these pamphlets if one were to look for ideological justification of new policies.

As for international affairs, matters were only slightly different. Stalin's pamphlets confirmed the validity of the 'two camp' theory. The only significant departure from orthodoxy was a revision of the Leninist theory of the inevitability of war. Stalin now declared the 'contradictions' among the imperialist states to be more acute than those between the imperialist camp and world socialism. The dogma on the inevitability of war between the two opposed socio-economic systems was thereby not discarded but modified: war among the imperialist states was held to be more likely than war between the two systems. More specifically, in the Stalinist perspective, West Germany, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, resentful of American 'tutelage', 'bondage', 'domination' and 'oppression', would sooner or later try to throw off the American yoke.[209] Obviously, if this diagnosis were correct, Soviet diplomats would have ample opportunities to exploit 'contradictions' both within and between these countries. The note, as argued, attempted to use such opportunities.

Put into the larger foreign policy context, the Berlin blockade and the Korean war had resulted in increased international tensions and a build-up of Western military power. In accordance with previous patterns of behaviour, Soviet foreign policy subsequently aimed at the mitigation of

208 The pamphlets were discussed before and after the Nineteenth Congress and then integrated in a textbook on political economy published in many languages, the English version being Joseph V. Stalin, *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1952).

209 Ibid., pp. 37-41.

these adverse trends by some conciliatory gestures and by playing on Western divergences. As Marshall D. Shulman has written in his seminal *Stalin's Foreign Policy Reappraised*:

> By restraint in the use of overt acts of provocation after the Korean attack, and by encouraging the development of neutralism, nationalism, the peace movement, and anticolonial agitation, Soviet foreign policy was intended to achieve such specific purposes as the weakening of the structure of American strategic air bases abroad ... as well as such general purposes as undermining the cohesion and momentum of the Western alliance.[210]

Stalin's 'peace note' on Germany corresponded with these purposes.

This conclusion is reinforced by the fact that, in line with such ideological preconceptions on international affairs, the suggestion of neutrality could not have been regarded as anything but, as Mao Tse-tung said, a 'hoax'.[211] As will be shown in the next section, the rejection of a unified 'neutral' Germany was reaffirmed by Stalin's successors.

6. Imperial Dilemmas: Beria and the Crisis in the GDR

As with Stalin's 'peace note', a substantial amount of evidence from Soviet archives, memoirs, and interviews has emerged to shed new light on Soviet thinking on the German problem in the 1950s. Some of this evidence has surfaced in connection with the so-called 'Beria affair', the alleged attempt by the former chief of the secret police to 'sell off' East Germany after Stalin's death in March 1953 in the context of the New Course adopted by Prime Minister Malenkov.[212] Lavrenti Beria at that time had just

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210 Marshall D. Shulman, *Stalin's Foreign Policy Reappraised* (New York: Atheneum, 1965), p. 259.

211 Mao Tse-tung, 'On the People's Democratic Dictatorship', as quoted in H. Wei, *China and Soviet Russia* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1956), p. 264.

212 The new sources include the memoirs of Andrei A. Gromyko, transl. Harold Shukman, *Memories* (London: Hutchinson, 1989); a supplement to Khrushchev's memoirs, N. S. Khrushchev, transl. and ed. Jerrold L. Schecter with Viacheslav V. Luchkov, *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990); and N. S. Khrushchev, 'Aktsii', in V. F. Nekrasov, ed., *Beria: Konets kar'ery* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1991). − Molotov's reminiscences, recorded in numerous conversations with the former foreign minister in the last ten years of his life by an obscure poet and ardent Stalinist named Felix Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, have already been mentioned. − Malenkov's side of the story can be found in several articles written by his son Andrei, as well as in interviews

taken charge of the new Ministry of the Interior (MVD), created by the merger of the interior and state security ministries. The stenographic record of a top secret CPSU Central Committee meeting, held on 2 July 1953, to discuss and approve Beria's arrest and execution, is particularly interesting.[213] It provides fascinating insights into the mind-set of the adherents to the Imperial and Ideological paradigm. It is, therefore, appropriate to look at some of the nuggets from this gold mine of information.

The CC meeting was preceded on 27 May by an important session of the Council of Ministers (the government) at which, according to Malenkov, the 'topic on the floor' had been the 'German problem' and the 'serious failure of the situation in the GDR'.

> We all concluded that as a result of incorrect policies, many mistakes had been made in the GDR. Among the German population there was huge dissatisfaction, which was particularly evident in the fact that the population of East Germany had begun to leave for West Germany. In the most recent period, approximately in the last two years, about 500,000 people have escaped to West Germany.

Analysis of the internal political and economic situation in the GDR, notably the 'mass migration' of East Germans to West Germany, had indicated that '*we are facing an internal catastrophe. We were obliged to face the truth and to admit that without the presence of Soviet troops the existing*

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given to him and others by Dmitrii Sukhanov, Malenkov's closest aide in the 1940s and 1950s; Andrei Malenkov, 'Protivoborstvo', *Zhurnalist*, No. 2 (February 1991), pp. 60-66, and Dmitrii Varskii, 'Skhvatka' (interview with Andrei Malenkov), *Vostochnii ekspress*, No. 16 (1991), pp. 8-9. − East German sources include the memoirs of Rudolf Herrnstadt, a former SED Politburo member, chief editor of *Neues Deutschland* and a major proponent of reform in the period after Stalin's death; Nadja Stulz-Herrnstadt, ed., *Das Herrnstadt Dokument: Das Politburo der SED und die Geschichte des 17. Juni 1953* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1990). − The Soviet instructions to the East German leadership in June 1953 have also now been published: 'Ein Dokument von großer historischer Bedeutung vom Mai 1953', *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung,* Vol. 32, No. 5 (1990), pp. 648-654, and 'Dokumente zur Auseinandersetzung in der SED 1953', ibid., Vol. 32, No. 5, (1990), pp. 655-672.

213 CPSU, CC, Top Secret, Plenum TsK KPSS, Iiul' 1953 goda. Stenograficheskii otchet, 'O prestupnykh antipartiinykh i antigosudarstvennykh deistviiakh Beriia', 2-7 July 1953, *Izvestiia TsK KPSS*, No. 1 (1991), pp. 140-214 and No. 2 (1991), pp. 141-208. All citations of this report will refer to the first installment in the January edition unless otherwise noted. Beria was arrested on 26 June 1953 and executed on 23 December.

regime in the GDR is not stable'.[214] Foreign Minister Molotov provided some detail about the internal catastrophe facing East Germany, saying that, 'in the period from January 1951 until April 1953, 450,000 people left the GDR for West Germany'; that this movement of people had increased 'particularly in the first months of this year'; and that 'among the escapees there were more than a few workers, including several thousand members' of the SED and the FDJ, the Union of Free German Youth. Conveniently shunning any Soviet responsibility for the mass exodus, Molotov concluded that all this was 'clearly an indication of huge deficiencies in the work of our friends in East Germany'.[215]

As the record unequivocally shows, there was no complacency among the top Soviet leaders in May and June 1953. This is confirmed, among other sources, by Pavel Sudoplatov, the head of the MVD's Ninth Department, known also as the Bureau for Special Tasks. In that capacity he was directly responsible to Beria and privy to the most sensitive information, including on East Germany. According to Sudoplatov, his chief was aware of the severe economic crisis in East Germany and also in Poland, which had caused thousands of people to flee to the West. A divided Germany would force the Soviet Union to supply both countries with cheap raw materials and foodstuffs until collectivization of agriculture and industrialization could mitigate the problem. German unification, on the other hand, would bring substantial economic benefits. He was 'obsessed' by the idea that $10 billion could be obtained for the reconstruction of the Soviet Union. 'The Kremlin', he told Sudoplatov, thought that the creation of a unified neutral Germany under a coalition government could be a buffer between the Soviet Union and the United States in Western Europe and the best way to strengthen the Moscow's global position. Ulbricht was to be forced to cooperate and consent to East Germany becoming an autonomous province in the new unified Germany.[216] Sudoplatov was told to explore the feasibility of a concomitant initiative and – through secret contacts in West Germany and Austria – to spread the rumour that the USSR was prepared to make a deal on Germany. The urgency of the matter was

214 Ibid., pp. 143-44 (italics mine). The mixture of past and present tense is as in the original.

215 Ibid., p. 162.

216 Pavel Sudoplatov, *Razvedka i Kreml'. Zapiski nezhelatel'nogo svidetelia* (Moscow: TOO 'Geia', 1996), pp. 414-15. *Provintsiia* is the term used by the author.

reinforced by Ulbricht's statements to the effect that it was the SED's goal to establish a dictatorship of the proletariat in the GDR and by East German reports of a split in the top leadership of the SED.[217] The top leadership of the CPSU was split, too. Molotov, in particular, opposed the idea of a unified neutral Germany. He, Beria, and Malenkov formed a commission to formulate policy guidelines for future Soviet policy in East Germany and to define the conditions for German unification.[218]

On 5 June, Vladimir Semenov, the newly appointed Soviet High Commissioner in Germany told the top East German leadership to slow down the building of socialism in the GDR and work for German unity. East Berlin asked for a delay of two weeks in order to consider the Soviet directives. Semenov rejected this request, commenting that the GDR would (then already?) be an autonomous area in a unified Germany.[219] At the beginning of June, Ulbricht and other top East German leaders were ordered to appear in Moscow. In a meeting with Beria, Malenkov, Khrushchev, Molotov, Semenov and General Andrei Grechko (the commander of the Soviet forces in Germany), the East Germans were informed of the Soviet decision against an accelerated construction of socialism in the GDR. Ulbricht is reported as having vehemently opposed this directive, as a result of which Beria, Malenkov and Khrushchev decided to depose him.[220]

The concern of the Soviet leadership was exacerbated by the outbreak of serious popular discontent, starting in East Berlin on 17 June and then rapidly spreading throughout East Germany, in response to an increase in work norms. This, too, was part of Ulbricht's drive for the accelerated construction of socialism in the GDR. How, then, did Beria react? According to Sudoplatov, his chief ordered Grechko and Semenov to use the Soviet armed forces in order to suppress the popular revolt, hoping that as a result of this demonstration of power he would enhance the chances for compromise with the Western countries. The West was to be under no illu-

217 In May, the East German State Security chief, General Ernst Wollweber, had been called to Moscow and provided this information; ibid., p. 415.

218 Ibid. Until late in his life, Molotov clung to the view – and disapproved – that Beria was prepared to sacrifice the GDR; see Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym*, p. 335.

219 Sudoplatov, *Razvedka i Kreml'*, p. 416. The author uses *oblast'* here.

220 This position was formally adopted in a 12 June 1953 CPSU Presidium (Politburo) decision. Although the decision has been referred to in official documents, a copy of it thus far has not been found, according to Sudoplatov; ibid.

sion that Soviet Union could be expelled from the GDR by a popular uprising.[221]

In view of the bankruptcy of Soviet and East German policies, why did the leadership in Moscow not cut its losses and liquidate the imperial outpost? And what about Beria? Was he really prepared to face up to the unpalatable East German realities and determined to free the Soviet Union of Stalin's imperial legacy in Germany? The proceedings at the July 1953 Central Committee meeting appear to confirm Sudoplatov's account that he was. At the meeting, Malenkov charged that Beria (presumably at the May 1953 session of the Council of Ministers) had 'suggested a course toward [the establishment of] a bourgeois Germany'. Similarly, Khrushchev decried that he (Beria) had 'proposed turning away from the construction of socialism in the GDR and heading toward concessions to the West' (which, in Khrushchev's view, would have meant 'giving away 18 million Germans to the rule of the American imperialists') and that he had said: 'We must create a neutral, democratic Germany.'[222]

The problem with these accusations is that the Kremlin leaders responsible for Beria's arrest were sure to find or fabricate the most heinous crimes in his past as justification for his execution.[223] In fact, taking a few leaves from Stalin's Great Book of Purges, they unmasked Beria as a 'bourgeois degenerate' (Malenkov); as a 'person from the bourgeois camp' (Molotov); as a treacherous 'bandit' who behaved 'not like a communist but like a provocateur' (Khrushchev); as someone who, 'without a

221 Ibid., p. 417.

222 CPSU, CC Plenum, 'O prestupnykh deisviiakh Beriia', p. 157. Khrushchev, like Molotov, continued to adhere to his position. In November 1960, he told Ulbricht in private conversation that Beria *and Malenkov* had 'wanted to liquidate the GDR, but we fired one [Malenkov] and shot the other [Beria]'; Record of the Meeting between Comrade N. S. Khrushchev and Comrade W. Ulbricht on 30 November 1960, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond* 0742, opis 6, *por.* 4, *papka* 43, Secret. The transcript of the meeting as published by Hope Harrison, 'Ulbricht and the Concrete "Rose": New Archival Evidence on the Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-61', Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Working Paper No. 5, May 1993 (hereafter Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence'), Appendix A.

223 In fact, several Western analyses have considered the charges against Beria to have been motivated almost exclusively by the power struggle in the Kremlin; see, for instance, Victor Baras, 'Beria's Fall and Ulbricht's Survival', *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (July 1975), pp. 381-95.

doubt, was connected with international imperialist intelligence services as a full-scale agent and spy' (Kaganovich); and an 'enemy of the Soviet Union' (Molotov). Even if one chooses to discount the more outlandish allegations, the CC proceedings and evidence from East German sources nevertheless indicate that Beria *was* prepared to go farther on the German problem than his erstwhile colleagues. But how far exactly? Trade union chief Lazar M. Kaganovich only spoke of Beria's '*leanings* towards what amounted to liquidating the GDR',[224] and Molotov revealed that Beria, in his draft resolution before the Presidium of the Council of Ministers on the German question, had

> proposed that we 'concede the error of building socialism in the German Democratic Republic under existing conditions'. He also suggested that we 'turn away from building socialism in the GDR *at the present time*'. This proposal was, of course, completely unacceptable. When I objected, Beria answered that, after all, he was only proposing to turn away from socialism in the GDR 'at present'.[225]

Such portrayals suggest that Beria only advocated a slower pace in the systemic transformation of East Germany but not to abandon the Soviet outpost altogether.

What, then, was the thinking of the majority of Politburo and Central Committee members? How should one 'correctly' have addressed the internal crisis in the GDR? And, above all, what was to be done? Perhaps paradoxically, the remedy they suggested for curing the ills at the periphery of empire was not altogether different from what Beria as a minimum appears to have advocated: reducing the pace in the 'construction of socialism' in the GDR. Nothing more than that. As Molotov reported to the CC meeting, '[w]e explained this to our German friends, and they agreed completely that, given current international conditions, it is unwise to force the construction of socialism in the GDR'.[226]

No detail was provided as to how effective such a course of action could possibly have been. The common operating assumption apparently was that the problems were only temporary and would somehow disappear. Such notions were nurtured by rationalizations. Molotov, for instance, thought:

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224 CPSU, CC Plenum, 'O prestupnykh deisviiakh Beriia', p. 199 (italics mine).
225 Ibid. p. 163 (italics mine).
226 Ibid., p. 143; similarly Molotov, ibid., p. 162.

> When examining the affair, we must consider that the GDR embarked upon an extremely hurried course of industrialization and that the Germans were involved in construction projects that far exceeded their resources. At the same time, East Germany was also required to bear significant expenditures for the occupation and to pay war reparations. Not to mention the reconstruction necessary after the war. Meanwhile, we must not forget that East Germany finds itself in particularly complex circumstances: The occupying powers in Berlin – the USA, England, and France – as well West Germany, have a disorganizing effect on the political and economic situation in the GDR.[227]

Indeed, these problems did contribute to the severe crisis in the GDR. Given the facts as acknowledged by the Soviet leaders, that much harm had been done by a rapacious reparations policy, that the success of economic reconstruction in West Germany was causing ideological and political problems and that the East German outpost could only be kept as long as Soviet troops were stationed there, the question needs to be restated even more emphatically: why did the Soviet leaders not follow the path imputed to Beria and stop the construction of socialism in East Germany? And why, in particular, did they not draw the conclusion from the June 1953 workers' uprising that their position in the GDR was even more tenuous than they had thought and abandon it?

The proceedings of the July 1953 CC meeting provide several answers to these questions. The first and foremost was impeccably Marxist-Leninist: a 'bourgeois', even though ostensibly democratic, Germany could not possibly be neutral. In Molotov's words, Beria was

verbose in his explanations to the effect that it would be fine for the Soviet Union if Germany united as a single state on bourgeois foundations – as if it were possible for a modern-day bourgeois Germany *not* to be tightly linked with other imperialist nations; and if, under present conditions, it were possible for a bourgeois Germany to exist that would not be at the same time an imperialist, aggressive Germany.[228]

His central point: 'As Marxists, it is clear to us that in the given situation, that is, in the imperialist epoch, the idea that bourgeois Germany might become peace-loving or neutral in relation to the USSR is not only an illusion but, in fact, a position foreign to communism.'[229] Khrushchev supported this reasoning and asked:

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227 Ibid.
228 Ibid., p. 162 (italics mine).
229 Ibid., p. 162 (italics mine).

> Could a democratic bourgeois Germany really be neutral? Is this possible? Beria said, 'We shall conclude a treaty.' But what would a treaty like this cost us? We know the price of treaties. A treaty is strong only if it is backed by guns. If a treaty is not backed up by force, it is worth nothing. We would be laughed at, we would be considered naive.[230]

A second rationale was that of the importance of the GDR in the struggle for influence in Europe. To Molotov it was self-evident that the very existence of the German Democratic Republic was 'a serious blow not only against German imperialism but also against the imperialist system throughout Europe'. If the GDR followed the 'correct political course', it would become a 'reliable friend of the Soviet Union' and 'a serious obstacle to the success of imperialist plans in Europe'.[231]

A third rationale was moral, psychological and emotional. To have followed Beria's course would have meant 'renouncing what was won with the blood of our soldiers, the blood of our people, in the tough battle against Hitlerism'.[232]

A fourth and final reason was the importance of East German uranium for the Soviet Union's nuclear weapons program. This was acknowledged by Avrami Zavenyagin, the deputy head of the Ministry for Medium Machine Building, one of the military-industrial ministries responsible for the manufacture of nuclear weapons. 'Large quantities of uranium are mined in the GDR', he said, 'perhaps no less than what is at the disposal of the Americans. This fact was well known to Beria, and he should have mentioned it to the Central Committee so they could have kept it in mind.'[233]

Given East Germany's manifest instability and blatant Western 'interference', was it not likely that Moscow could be *forced* to abandon its exposed position in Central Europe? The top leadership assembled in secret thought that it would *not* have to yield under pressure. And why not? Molotov gave the answer: 'The correlation of international forces has fundamentally changed after the Second World War in favour of the USSR and the states which are friendly towards it.' Among the friendly countries, in addition to East Germany, he counted China, North Korea, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Albania and Mongolia. He thereby arrived at a total of 800 million people engaged in the

230 Ibid., pp. 157-58.
231 Ibid., p. 162.
232 Ibid., p. 162.
233 Ibid., No. 2 (February 1991), p. 170.

building of socialism.[234] Furthermore, nuclear weapons could be counted on to discourage Western adventurism. Thus, Zavenyagin reminded his colleagues that the United States' monopoly in nuclear fission weapons had been 'liquidated'. Having realized this, the 'Americans have begun to develop a hydrogen bomb'. Such a weapon would have a 'destructive force ten times greater than that of the conventional nuclear bomb' and have not only technical but global political significance. Prevention of a second US monopoly therefore would be a 'most important event in world politics', and he assured his colleagues that, in the race for the development of this weapon, 'we think that we have not fallen behind the Americans'.[235]

To summarize, the Soviet leaders were perfectly well aware of the main problems of imperial control in Germany. The GDR lacked legitimacy. There was a tremendous outflow of people. Politically, the regime was unstable. It could be kept in power only by the presence of Soviet forces. Ideologically, the GDR was in a difficult position because of the presence of the Western allies and the flourishing of a Western way of life in West Berlin. Economically, the GDR had fallen behind its Western counterpart because of the Soviet Union's reparations policy, structural deficiencies and the diversion of trade. Nevertheless, the competition with imperialism required holding on to East Germany. The more favourable 'correlation of forces' made it possible to do so.

Such assessments, however, posed two basic questions as to future trends: (1) Could the shift in the 'correlation of forces' in favour of socialism be maintained and external threats to the Soviet position in Germany be warded off for the long term? (2) Was it going to be possible to achieve viability of the GDR and avert an internal collapse? The course of events from the mid-1950s to the beginning of the 1960s was still to give ambiguous answers to these questions.

To extend this overview of Soviet perceptions and policies on the German problem to the mid-1950s, proposals put forward by the collective leadership under Malenkov in 1954 were in all likelihood, like Stalin's note, a tactical device rather than a genuine offer of reunification and timed to prevent or delay the entry of the Federal Republic in NATO, a step that, in accordance with the October 1954 Paris agreements, was

234 Ibid., p. 170.
235 Ibid., No. 2 (February 1991), p. 166.

scheduled to take place in May 1955. When Khrushchev became the dominant figure in the Soviet leadership in that year he therefore did not find himself faced with similarly difficult choices and complexities as his predecessors: West Germany was firmly being integrated in the Atlantic alliance and the European Economic Community. East Germany became a member of the Warsaw Pact and its economic extension, the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), and the Soviet leaders were committing themselves firmly to the GDR's survival and viability. But the achievement of these objectives remained elusive. The next major crisis in the periphery was already brewing.

7. Imperial Dilemmas: The Berlin Wall

The driving forces behind the outbreak of yet another crisis of Soviet control in the GDR and the reasons for the construction of the Berlin wall in August 1961 are by now well understood. As in 1952-53, they consisted of East Germany's ever present lack of political legitimacy, economic deficiencies and the exodus of significant numbers of East Germans to West Germany that suddenly became acute. Soviet archival sources, memoirs and interviews have served to clarify this.[236] Formally, at the international diplomatic level, the crisis began at the end of October 1958 with the assertion by East German leader Walter Ulbricht that 'The Western powers have destroyed the legal basis for their presence in Berlin' and that they 'no longer have any legal, moral, or political justification for their continued occupation of West Berlin'. He also *de facto* threatened the replacement of Four Power rights with East German sovereignty by claiming that 'All of Berlin lies on the territory of the GDR'.[237]

The threat against the Western presence and Western access rights was amplified by Khrushchev two weeks later. On 10 November, at a friend-

236 For the most important presentation of such evidence, see Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', and Vladislav Zubok, 'The Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962: New Evidence from Soviet Archives', Conference on the Cold War, Moscow, January 1993.

237 Gerhard Keiderling and Percy Stulz, *Berlin 1945-1968: Zur Geschichte der Hauptstadt der DDR und der selbständigen politischen Einheit Westberlin* ([East] Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1970), p. 461.

ship meeting at the Polish embassy in Moscow, he stated that the Western powers had

> violated the Potsdam Agreement repeatedly and with impunity, while we have remained loyal to it as if nothing had changed. We have every reason to set ourselves free from obligations under the Potsdam Agreement, obligations which have outlived themselves and which the Western powers are clinging to, and to pursue a policy with regard to Berlin that would spring from the interests of the Warsaw Treaty.[238]

Khrushchev also argued that 'if the Western powers are interested in any questions regarding Berlin' they should 'build their relations with the German Democratic Republic'.[239] Implied here was the threat of a unilateral Soviet renunciation of the Potsdam Agreement and the establishment of a system that would take into account vaguely defined interests of the socialist countries and include the GDR as a sovereign, internationally recognized state.

This threat was spelled out in more detail in the Berlin ultimatum of 28 November 1958 – identical notes sent by the Soviet government to the three Western powers and a similar note addressed to the Federal Republic of Germany.[240] The central point advanced in the note to the three Western powers is the proposal

> to solve the West Berlin question at the present time by the conversion of West Berlin into an independent political unit [*samostoiatel'naia politicheskaia edinitsa*] – a free city, without any state, including both existing German states, interfering in its life. Specifically, it might be possible to agree that the territory of the free city be demilitarized and that no armed forces be maintained there. The free city, West Berlin, could regulate its own economic, administrative, and other affairs.[241]

The proposal could be regarded as limited in scope. However, the political stakes were raised considerably by declarations of the Soviet government to the effect that it regarded the wartime agreements relating to zones of occupation, administration, and control machinery in Germany and Berlin as null and void; that it proposed, for six months only, 'not to make any changes in the present procedure for military traffic' of the three powers

238 *Pravda*, 11 November 1958 (italics mine).
239 Ibid.
240 The full text of the notes and Khrushchev's comments are published in *Pravda*, 28 November 1958.
241 Ibid.

between West Germany and West Berlin; and that if this grace period were not used to reach an acceptable agreement, 'the Soviet Union will then carry out the planned measures through an agreement with the GDR'.[242]

Khrushchev's demands raise the analytical problem, as in the Berlin crisis of 1948-49, of whether Berlin in Moscow's perspective was a *lever* with which to achieve more far-reaching objectives or a *prize* in order to stabilize the GDR. In a strict sense, West Berlin was the primary topic of the note. But at the same time, the 'free city' proposal touched upon a whole range of broad issues, such as the extent of Four Power rights and responsibilities in Germany and Berlin; relations between West Berlin and Bonn; access to West Berlin for West German and Western allied personnel and goods; recognition of the GDR, *de facto* or *de iure*; the role of East Germany in European politics; the nature of relations between East and West Germany; and, finally, the question of European security and superpower relations. While it was theoretically possible to separate West Berlin from larger issues, in practice it was impossible.

As in the Berlin crisis of 1948-49, therefore, it is appropriate to abandon the idea of a single objective pursued by the Soviet Union in the crisis and to proceed instead from the idea that Khrushchev, during the prolonged campaign for the conclusion of a peace treaty, pursued a range of objectives. The most important of these goals can be listed as follows: to induce the Western powers to yield their position in Berlin – the goal most unlikely to be realized; to enhance the domestic stability and the international status of the GDR; to limit the influence of West Berlin as a showcase of the West and enhance its sense of vulnerability by weakening its ties with West Germany; to win final and irrevocable acceptance of the post-war political and social order in Europe; and to neutralize the threat to this order emanating from West Germany, that is, her declared policy of non-recognition of the GDR (and the borders) and her desire to see Germany united.[243]

The new archival evidence corroborates previous Western interpretations to the effect that Khrushchev was determined to change the *status quo* and use the demand for the conclusion of a peace treaty for this pur-

242 Ibid.

243 This interpretation of a range of objectives rather than a single goal pursued by Khrushchev in the Berlin crisis is shared by Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe: 1945-1970* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 89-90.

pose. At a meeting between Khrushchev and Ulbricht in November 1960, the Soviet leader told his East German counterpart that

> When we put forward the question of a peace treaty we also made allowance for the possibility of concluding an interim agreement, that is, an agreement between the four powers on a temporary status for West Berlin for a limited time, during which both Germanys would have to agree on the issues. If they did not agree, then we would be free to conclude a peace treaty with the GDR. This was our concession to Eisenhower so as to save his prestige and not create the impression that we would expel them [the Western powers] from West Berlin. This continues to remain true now. You Germans probably will not agree amongst yourselves and then we will sign a peace treaty with you, and the Western powers will not conclude any peace treaty at all. But this does not worry us.[244]

What in part may have prompted Khrushchev to take the initiative in autumn 1958 was his assumption that the 'correlation of forces' had again shifted in favor of the Soviet Union. The favourable trends, from the Soviet perspective, included the launching of the Sputnik earth satellite in October 1957, which conveyed the notion that the Soviet Union was not only a 'revolutionary' power ideologically but also a force to be reckoned with technologically. The feat in space also had military implications: it demonstrated that the Soviet Union was able to produce ICBMs. This in turn raised concern in the United States about the possible emergence of a 'missile gap' in favor of the USSR. Despite the fact that the Soviet Union never embarked on the production of first-generation ICBMs, the successful launching of the Sputnik and subsequent highly publicized Soviet ICBM flight tests heralded the end of United States invulnerability to long-range Soviet missile attack. Predictably, the psychological repercussions of this new reality and the concern about actual or potential shifts in the balance of power to the West's disadvantage were skilfully exploited by Khrushchev during the Berlin crisis.[245]

Similar considerations apply to the economic competition between the two world systems. The Soviet Union's economic growth rates in the late

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244 Record of the Meeting between Comrade N.S. Khrushchev and Comrade W. Ulbricht on 30 November 1960, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond* 0742, *opis* 6, *por* 4, papka 43, Secret. The transcript of the meeting as published by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', Appendix A.

245 This was carefully documented by Arnold L. Horelick and Myron Rush, *Strategic Power and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

1950s, according to official Soviet data, were quite high, with industrial production growing at more than ten percent, whereas corresponding American growth rates were only little more than two percent. This gave Khrushchev the idea that it would be possible 'to catch up with and overtake the USA by 1970' – wishful thinking which, much to later Soviet embarrassment and regret, was enshrined as a goal in the 1959 Seven-Year Plan and the 1961 party program. Finally, favourable trends in the 'correlation of forces' also seemed to be inherent in the rapidly accelerating processes of decolonization which severely shook the Western 'imperialist' system and, in accordance with Marxist-Leninist theory, threatened to produce the final collapse of the opposed socio-economic system.

By 1961, however, the 'correlation of forces' and corresponding perceptions in Washington and Moscow had significantly shifted to the disadvantage of the Soviet Union. Soviet ICBM capabilities and claims had turned out to be exaggerated. The 'missile gap' was recognized as what it was: a myth. The rift with China, carefully concealed from the outside world in the late 1950s, became public in 1961. The processes of decolonization did not automatically and invariably favour the Soviet Union. More often than not they merely led to the replacement of direct with indirect Western control but certainly did not produce the collapse of the capitalist world system as predicted by Soviet ideology. Most important for the present inquiry, the balance of power in Central Europe was shifting against the Soviet Union. Western security cooperation and defense integration were proceeding at a rapid pace, including in particular the creation of the West German *Bundeswehr* and its possible equipment with nuclear weapons under a 'dual key' system, with joint German and American decision-making as to their use. Thus, in October 1958, the Soviet ambassador to West Germany, Andrei Smirnov, told Ulbricht that 'the situation in West Germany has become much more complicated for us' and that 'In West Germany, they are continuing the arming of the *Bundeswehr* with nuclear weapons, which are now legal'.[246]

246 Record of the Meeting with Ulbricht on 5 October 1958 (Pervukhin's diary, entry of 11 October 1958), TsKhSD, *rolik* 8875, *fond* 5, *opis* 49, *delo* 82, p. 7-8, as quoted by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', p. 13. Smirnov, the Soviet ambassador to Bonn, in conversation with Ulbricht, the Soviet ambassador to East Berlin, Mikhail Pervukhin and Soviet foreign ministry official Sergei Astavin. – The 'arming of the Bundeswehr with nuclear weapons' as well as the creation of a legal basis in West Germany to that effect did not correspond to reality. A Nato

Soviet and East German perceptions of shifts in the balance of power increased concerns in Moscow and East Berlin that the West would make more determined efforts to undermine the communist system in East Germany. Thus, the Soviet ambassador to the GDR, Mikhail Pervukhin, told Ulbricht in September 1958, that 'the West is preparing to carry out a series of significant economic and political measures against the GDR'.[247] Smirnov, agreed, warning that 'the Western powers are talking openly about activating the struggle against the GDR'. It was even possible that 'the West will not stop at limited local provocations on GDR territory'.[248]

Trends in the socio-economic sphere, from Soviet and East German perspectives, were of equal concern. Western European integration, as epitomized by the success of the European Economic Community (EEC), posed the danger of Western Europe outpacing Eastern Europe in economic performance, power and prosperity. The West German *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) made shambles of Ulbricht's idea, borrowed from Khrushchev's precepts of Soviet-American competition, to 'catch up with and overtake' West Germany. Instead of narrowing, the economic gap between the two German competitors threatened to *widen* and exacerbate the problems of ideological competition and East German viability and legitimacy. Pervukhin, in an internal report, deplored 'the uncontrolled borders between the socialist and capitalist worlds unwittingly prompt the [East German] population to make a comparison between both

agreement of December 1957 gave custody of nuclear warheads to the Americans, while the allies maintained the delivery vehicles. In the communications between Soviet officials in East and West Germany and the center in Moscow essentially no distinction was drawn between equipping the German armed forces with delivery vehicles and the 'dual key' system for their use (i.e. the U.S. would always have to agree), on the one hand, and independent West German access to nuclear weapons, on the other.

247 Record of the Meeting with Comrade W. Ulbricht on 26 September 1958 (Pervukhin's diary, entry of 30 September 1958), TsKhSD, *rolik* 8873, *fond* 5, *opis* 49, *delo* 76, p. 1, ibid., p. 14. Pervukhin was Soviet ambassador to East Berlin from 1958 to 1962.

248 Record of the Meeting with Comrade W. Ulbricht on 5 October 1958 (Pervukhin's diary, entry of 11 October 1958), TsKhSD, *rolik* 8875, *fond* 5, *opis* 49, *delo* 8276, p. 9, ibid. Smirnov was Soviet ambassador to West Germany from 1956 to 1966.

parts of the city, which unfortunately does not always turn out in favour of Democratic Berlin'.[249]

Three factors interacted to produce a severe socio-economic crisis in the GDR in 1961.[250] The first was a new wave of collectivization in agriculture. In 1949-58, the pace of conversion of private lands into collective farms had been slow. At the end of 1958, as much as two-thirds of the total agricultural area was still in private hands. In 1959, however, the SED leadership decided to make greater efforts in the 'socialist construction in the countryside'. Severe pressure was exerted on private farmers to join collective farms, with 300,000 private farms changing ownership in that year, and another 300,000 in the first four months of 1960. As a result, private farming in the GDR practically ceased to exist but at the cost of a severe decline in agricultural production. The history of forced collectivisation in the Stalin's Soviet Union found its repetition in Ulbricht's East Germany.

A second factor of the crisis lay in a simultaneously launched ambitious investment programme. Because of the disproportionally higher wartime destruction as compared to West Germany, greater dismantling of equipment by the occupying power, reparations extracted from current production, utilization of forced labour for the benefit of the USSR, monetary losses due to unequal trade with the Soviet Union and an aging capital base the East German economy was in a dismal state. The Seven-Year Plan of 1959-65, therefore, sought to create new capacities, and to create them *rapidly*. Investment was to increase by 142 billion marks, which exceeded the GDR's total net material product of 141 billion marks! Despite consumer-oriented rhetoric, the emphasis was put on investment in heavy industry. The means with which the unrealistic goals were to be achieved, as an 1953, were demands by the SED for greater efforts by the working population, higher work norms, tightened labour discipline and cutbacks in private consumption.

The two factors, collectivization and tougher work norms for industrialization, interacted to produce a third: an increasing shortage of skilled labour, due primarily to the westward migration of East German farmers,

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249 On Several Issues Regarding the Economic and Political Situation in Berlin, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, delo 022/GDR, Referentyra p GDR, *opis* 4, *por.* 3, *papka* 27, p. 1, as quoted by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', p. 26.

250 The description of the factors producing a socio-economic crisis in the GDR in 1961 follows Adomeit, *Soviet Risk Taking and Crisis Behavior*, pp. 232-37.

workers, technicians, and managers. To put things in perspective, in the period from the end of the Second World War until 1961 a total of 3.8 million people had emigrated to West Germany but only 565,000 had migrated to the east – a net loss of 3.25 million inhabitants.[251] In the period 1949-61 the population of the GDR had decreased from more than 19 million to little more than 17 million. In 1953, the year of the June workers' revolt, more than 330,000 had left the GDR – the highest annual figure at any time in the state's existence. After a decline in 1954 and 1955, the numbers rose to about 279,000 in 1956. They then fell again to 144,000 in 1959. But despite the then much lower base of the population, the number of migrants increased in 1960 to nearly 200,000 people. In the last months of 1960 and the first six months of 1961 the *monthly* rate rose dramatically to reach between 20,000 and 30,000 people. A critical point had been reached. Disruption of the whole complex planning and production process became endemic since qualified replacements for farm managers, skilled mechanics and engineers in heavy industry, or foremen in the construction industry could no longer be found.

As in 1953, the serious consequences were well understood in Moscow. The problem of the stability of the GDR and its repercussions on the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe again moved to centre stage in the discussions among and between Soviet and East German officials. As early as August 1958, Yuri Andropov, the then head of the Central Committee department on relations with the communist and workers' parties, wrote an urgent letter to the CC in which he pointed to the significant rise in the number of highly qualified East German personnel among the refugees, an increase of 50 percent as compared to the previous year. The East German leadership, he complained, claimed that the qualified cadres were leaving for the higher standard of living in West Germany. However, reports from refugees indicated that their motives were often more political than material. 'In view of the fact that the issue of the flight of [skilled workers and] the intelligentsia from the GDR has reached a particularly critical phase', he warned, 'it would be expedient to discuss this with Comrade Ulbricht,

251 Sources for these data are *Die Flucht aus der Sowjetzone und die Sperrmaßnahmen des kommunistischen Regimes vom 13. August 1961* (Bonn: Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen, 1961); *DDR-Handbuch*, 3rd ed., Cologne 1985, esp. p. 419; and Thomas Ammer, 'Flucht aus der DDR', *Deutschland-Archiv*, No. 11 (1989), p. 1207.

using his stay in the USSR to explain to him our apprehensions on this issue.[252]

Discussions did ensue. In Western interpretation, it has generally been accepted that it was Ulbricht who attempted to push Khrushchev toward taking action on both the specific issue of stopping the outflow of refugees and the larger problem of a peace treaty, and that Khrushchev resisted these pressures. In private conversation between the two leaders on 30 November 1960 in Moscow, however, the Khrushchev wanted to separate the two issues, his preference being the conclusion of a peace treaty, with Ulbricht in the interim taking measures to close the Berlin loophole. At a crucial juncture in the conversation, the Kremlin leader asked Ulbricht about his views on the conclusion of a peace treaty.

> N.S. Khrushchev: When will we sign it, in 1961?
> W. Ulbricht: No!
> N.S. Khrushchev: Why [not]?
> W. Ulbricht: We don't have the courage.
> N.S. Khrushchev: Politically or economically?
> W. Ulbricht: Just economically. Politically I am in favour.[253]

In a strange reversal of positions, the Soviet leader then attempted to convince his East German counterpart that the peace treaty was a top priority; that the risks of a Western military response were small; and that economic consequences could be contained. A peace treaty should be concluded in 1961, either jointly with the Western powers or separately between the USSR and the GDR. The date to be envisaged was the planned summit conference with President Kennedy in June. As for the risks of Western military counteraction in response to the conclusion of a separate treaty, Khrushchev told Ulbricht that 'we are almost certain that the Western powers will not start a war'. On the economic front, he said, 'we would lose little economically by [that step]. ... Essentially, the existing situation would be preserved.'[254] In contrast, the major benefit of proceeding as he suggested lay in the political realm.

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252 Letter from Yu. Andropov to the CPSU Central Committee of 28 August 1958, TsKhSD, *rolik* 8875, *fond* 5, *opis* 49, *delo* 82, pp. 1-3, as quoted by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', p. 17.

253 Record of the Meeting between Comrade N.S. Khrushchev and Comrade W. Ulbricht of 30 November 1960, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond* 0742, *opis* 6, *por.* 4, *papka* 43, Secret. The transcript of the meeting as published by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', Appendix A.

254 Ibid.

> [P]olitically, our situation would improve, since it would mean a defeat of the West. If we don't sign a peace treaty in 1961, then when? If we don't sign it in 1961, then our prestige will have been dealt a blow and the position of the West, and West Germany in particular, will be strengthened. We could get away with not signing a peace treaty if an interim agreement on West Berlin were concluded. If there is not an interim agreement, then we will sign a peace treaty with the GDR and let them see their defeat. They will not start a war. Of course, in signing a peace treaty, we will have to put our rockets on military alert. But, luckily, our adversaries still haven't gone crazy; they still think, and their nerves still aren't bad.

The priority which Khrushchev gave to political issues, however, by no means indicated a lack of concern about East Germany's economic crisis, her vulnerability to West German pressure and the costs of empire. Like Brezhnev and Gorbachev subsequently, he was incensed about what he perceived to be unacceptable East German economic dependency on West Germany and the apparent necessity for the Soviet Union and other Warsaw Pact countries for strategic reasons to stabilize economic conditions in the GDR. Both 'our and your fault', he told Ulbricht, 'lies in the fact that we did not sufficiently think through and work out economic measures. We should have thought more precisely about liberating the GDR economy from the FRG. ... We did not know that the GDR is so vulnerable to West Germany. This is not good; we must correct this.' He then put the blame squarely on Ulbricht: *'[Y]ou did not offer resistance [to the West Germans], you did not disentangle yourselves, you got used to thinking that Germany was [still] one.'*[255]

Furthermore, the record elucidates in vivid detail Soviet awareness of the costs of empire. It also reveals an acute dilemma: the aversion to subsidize the GDR but at the same time the perceived necessity of having to do so in the interest of safeguarding the Soviet strategic position in the centre of Europe and to improve the competitive position of East Germany *vis-à-vis* West Germany. In typically colourful and contradictory Khrushchevian fashion, he told Ulbricht: 'We must create a special group in our Gosplan with [East German Minister of Economic Affairs, Bruno] Leuschner, which will receive everything needed on his demand. There is no other way. The GDR must develop and maintain the increase [sic] in the standard of living of its population.' But Khrushchev then clarified that everything should not to be taken too literally. For instance, 'you ask

255 Ibid. (italics mine).

[us] for 68 tons of gold. This is inconceivable. *We can't have a situation where you buy goods and we must pay for them.* We don't have much gold, and we must keep it for an emergency.' Earlier in the private conversation, he had warned: '[Y]ou will not encroach on our gold. Why give you gold? If you need cocoa, coffee, rubber, then buy it in Ceylon or Indonesia. Build something there. But free us from this and don't thrust your hands into our pockets.' Ignoring the exigencies of central planning and the close involvement of the Soviet Union in East German economic affairs, Khrushchev complained: 'By old habit, you try to do everything through us. *You should have learned how to walk on your own two feet instead of leaning on us all the time.'*[256]

The evidence also confirms that other Warsaw Pact member countries were not at all pleased by the prospect of having to participate in a massive subsidization of East Germany in the interest of maintaining the viability of the Soviet empire. At the summit conference of leaders of the socialist bloc, from 3 to 5 August 1961, Khrushchev praised Ulbricht for his 'heroic job' in the construction of socialism in the GDR, notably the completion of collectivization of agriculture ('you cannot build socialism without it'). Without referring directly to the Polish and Czechoslovak party leaders Władysław Gomułka and Antonín Novotný, he chided them for 'national narrow-mindedness' and excessive 'enthusiasm about peaceful construction' to the detriment of the interests of the socialist community as a whole. He then proceeded to ask two questions: (1) Do we need the GDR as the first line of defense? (2) Do we have to maintain the high living standards in the GDR even at the expense of improvements in the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries?[257] Both questions he answered in the affirmative, and for the benefit of the Polish and Czechoslovak comrades he painted the likely consequences of a failure to support the GDR in stark colours. A lowering of living standards of the GDR to the East European level would lead to East Germany being swallowed by West Germany and would create an intolerable strategic situation: *'[T]he Bundeswehr would advance to the Polish border ... to the border with Czechoslovakia ... nearer to our Soviet border.'*[258]

256 Ibid. (italics mine).

257 Transcript of summit conference, TsKhSD, *fond* 5, *opis* 49, *delo* 365, 11. 165, 168, 170, as quoted by Zubok, 'The Berlin Crisis', p. 31.

258 Ibid. (italics mine).

On the surface, the November 1960 exchanges appear to indicate that it was Khrushchev who was pushing for political action despite economic constraints, whereas Ulbricht was attempting to put the brakes on Soviet political initiatives because of economic considerations. To repeat, whereas the Soviet leader was still aiming at solutions within a Four Power framework and a peace treaty, his East German counterpart wanted an immediate practical solution of the problem of open borders around Berlin and trying to persuade his Soviet counterpart to take unilateral action. This basic asymmetry was clearly recognized by Pervukhin. In a 'top secret' letter to Foreign Minister Gromyko, he wrote:

> Trying to liquidate the remnants of the occupation period as soon as possible, our German friends sometimes demonstrate *impatience* and a somewhat *one-sided approach* to this problem, not always heeding the interests of the entire socialist camp or the international situation at the given moment. Evidence for this, for example, is their effort to stop the free movement between the GDR and West Berlin *as soon as possible by any means*, which in the present conditions would complicate carrying out the struggle for a peace treaty. Recognizing the correctness of our position that the liquidation of the remains of the occupation period is possible only on the basis of a peace treaty, our friends therefore urge a speedy conclusion of a peace treaty with the GDR.[259]

A decision in principle to close the borders was apparently reached at the 3-5 August 1961 meeting of Warsaw Pact leaders in Moscow. The extensive but still incomplete record does not reveal whether a final decision was made at the conference. There is no mention of a wall to be built. No reference exists as to whether the Soviet and East German leaders met separately before, during, or after the conference to discuss details of implementation.[260] Ulbricht was to state later that the meeting had agreed 'to carry out the various measures gradually', which could mean that the details were left up to him as long as there would be no serious complications.[261] Whatever the case may be, by the summer of 1961 Khrushchev

259 Letter from Ambassador Pervukhin to Foreign Minister Gromyko, 19 May 1961, Top Secret, Russian Foreign Ministry Archives, *fond*: Referentyra po GDR, *opis* 6, *por.* 34, *inv.* 193/3, Vol. 1, *papka* 46. The letter as published by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', Appendix D (italics mine).

260 On these issues, see Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', pp. 47-51.

261 Letter from Ulbricht and the SED Central Committee Delegation to the CPSU Twenty-second Congress in Moscow to Khrushchev, 30 October 1961, SED Central Archives, NL 182/1206. Text as published by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', Appendix K.

had become convinced that drastic unilateral action to close the borders had become inevitable if the empire was to be maintained and that the green light had to be given to the East German leadership to act accordingly.

There is, of course, another interpretation. The counter-argument holds that Ulbricht was hardly ever a pliable and passive ally, and as the domestic situation in the GDR deteriorated, he turned even more intractable. He disregarded Soviet advice and defied instructions. In particular, he 'acted against Soviet wishes regarding the control regime at the Berlin sectoral border'. He 'instructed [sic] Khrushchev on how to handle negotiations with the West'. Finally, 'he forced Khrushchev to act'. The Soviet leader 'caved in' because he wanted to forestall ever more 'unilateral actions' by Ulbricht, and he wanted 'to get him off his back' once and for all.[262]

Such reasoning is fundamentally erroneous. In natural history, the tail does not wag the dog. It is the other way around. This fact of natural life applies to the history of Soviet-East German relations as well. Given the Kremlin's firm determination to hold on to its imperial possessions in Europe but faced with the prospect of one of its allies collapsing, resolute action was, to use a favourite Soviet term, 'objectively' required; and Khrushchev ultimately did what he himself – not Ulbricht – thought what was necessary.[263]

The measures adopted had profound consequences.

8. Consolidation of the Soviet Empire and the 'Correlation of Forces'

In a letter written one month after the imposition of border controls, Ulbricht was to inform Khrushchev that the measures of 13 August had been a tremendous success. Not only 'must [I] say that the adversary undertook

262 This is the line of argument developed by Hope M. Harrison, *Driving the Soviets up the Wall: Soviet-East German Relations, 1953-1961;* quotes on pp. 219 and 223.

263 The 'East German tail wags the Soviet dog' theory was competently rejected also by Gerhard Wettig, *Chruschtschows Berlin-Krise 1958 bis 1963: Drohpolitik und Mauerbau* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 2006), pp. 285-87. To emphasize the point: It is a well known phenomenon of life, including international life, that it is far easier to obstruct and prevent decisions than to compel someone to take decisions.

fewer countermeasures than expected', but the following aims had been achieved:

1. 'The protection of the GDR against the organization of a civil war and military provocations from West Berlin.'
2. 'The cessation of the economic and cultural undermining of the capital of the GDR by the West Berlin swamp.'
3. 'A change in the political situation will occur. The Bonn government has understood that the policy of revenge and the plan to roll back the GDR ... have been destroyed for all time. This will later have great effects on the tactics of the Western powers regarding Poland and Czechoslovakia.'
4. 'The authority of the GDR state, which was weakened by its tolerance towards the subversive measures from West Berlin, was strengthened and a revolution in the thinking of the population of the capital and the GDR has occurred.'[264]

Soviet analysts agreed. They noted that 'the rug was pulled from under the feet of the adventurist elements, who had hoped to kindle a military conflict at the open border between the GDR and West Berlin.'[265] In West Germany, they asserted, Adenauer's policies from positions of strength, or *Politik der Stärke*, came to be seen as unworkable. The building of the wall 'significantly consolidated the domestic situation in the GDR and contributed to the successful building of socialism in that country'.[266] In fact, that process was regarded as being so successful that, in the 1970s and 1980s, the GDR came to be considered as politically the most stable and economically and technologically the most advanced country in the Soviet bloc. From Moscow's perspective, in that period the GDR was changing from a liability to an asset. It retained its position as a strategic

264 Letter from Ulbricht to Khrushchev, 15 September 1961, SED Central Archives, Central Committee files, Büro Walter Ulbricht, J IV, 2/202/130. Text as published by Harrison, 'New Archival Evidence', Appendix I.

265 A. S. Grossman, 'Granitsa mira', *Voprosy istorii*, No. 10 (1969), p. 201; V. G. Trukhanovskii, ed., *Istoriia mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii i vneshnei politiki SSSR, Vol. 3: 1945-1963 gg.* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1964), pp. 211-212; and N. N. Inozemtsev, *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia posle vtoroi mirovoi voiny, Vol. 3: 1956-1964 gg.* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1962), pp. 523-34.

266 Grossman, 'Granitsa mira', p. 201; similarly Georgi M. Akopov, *Zapadnyi Berlin. Problemy i resheniia* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1974), pp. 164-255; and Viktor Vysotskii, *Zapadnyi Berlin i ego mesto v sisteme sovremmenykh mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii* (Moscow: Mysl, 1971), pp. 237-45.

outpost but one that no longer needed to be subsidized, and was perceived to contribute to making the Soviet empire in Eastern Europe more viable. However, as will be argued in subsequent chapters, two developments marred Moscow's perceptions of fundamental progress achieved in the consolidation of empire, one rather predictable and consistent with the East German success story, the other seemingly contradicting it: (1) the rising self-confidence of the SED leaders, of both Ulbricht and Honecker, made the GDR a much more difficult country to deal with, and (2) despite its apparent success, the GDR was regarded as drifting again into dangerous dependencies on West Germany.

Soviet perceptions of the progress that was made in the consolidation of the empire were closely tied yet again to the 'correlation of forces'. One of the most important lessons which the Soviet leaders derived from the Berlin crisis was that of the continued importance of military power, both conventional and nuclear, in international affairs. As a result, as other instruments of exerting influence and retaining imperial control were becoming dull, the military instrument was sharpened. Strong attempts were made by successive Soviet leaderships to change the military balance in their favor. In the early post-war period, the Soviet Union had achieved preponderance in conventional weapons. In both East and West, the asymmetries were generally perceived to be so wide that the Soviet Union was considered to be able to overrun Western Europe. To counteract this advantage, the United States, beginning in 1947, had begun to build a countervailing force in the form of nuclear weapons. But Western Europe was not to escape its predicament as a Soviet 'hostage' since the USSR, too, transformed itself into a formidable nuclear power. This transformation began at the theatre nuclear level in the late 1950s and early 1960s. It was extended thereafter to intermediate-range nuclear forces, with the deployment of a large bomber and missile force. After the Cuban missile crisis, the military build-up was to include intercontinental forces, the Soviet Union achieving rough strategic parity with the United States by the end of the 1960s. Finally, in the 1970s, the Soviet Union embarked on a program of developing capabilities for intervention and power projection far beyond its borders.

The improvement of the Soviet position in the military balance of power was duly noted by Khrushchev. As he was to say later: 'No longer were we contaminated by Stalin's fear. No longer did we look at the world through his eyes. Now it was our enemies who trembled in *their* boots. Thanks to our missiles, we could deliver a nuclear bomb to a target at any

place in the world. No longer was the industrial heartland of the United States invulnerable to our counterattack.'[267] Khrushchev continued: 'Of course, we tried to derive maximum advantage from the fact that we were the first to launch our rockets into space. We wanted to exert pressure on American militarists – and also to influence the minds of more reasonable politicians.'[268]

Pressure based on vague nuclear threats was exerted not only on American 'militarists' but also, in fact, even more so, on *European* policy makers and public opinion. This design to safeguard Soviet security interests and expand Soviet influence was first used during the Suez crisis in 1956, when Khrushchev issued nuclear threats against Britain and France. It was also applied during the protracted controversy over Berlin between 1958 and 1961, when he threatened that, in the event of war, NATO military bases in various European countries would be destroyed by Soviet nuclear strikes (in Italy, 'even if they are in orange groves', or in Greece, in 'olive groves');[269] that Germany would be 'reduced to dust';[270] and that 'the very existence of the population of West Germany would be called in question'.[271]

Khrushchev, in retrospect, held such threats to have been effective: If a third world war were to be unleashed, he quoted Adenauer as having said numerous times, West Germany would be the first country to perish. 'I was pleased to hear this, and Adenauer was absolutely right in what he said'. Khrushchev then continued: 'For him to be making public statements was a great achievement on our part. Not only were we keeping our number one enemy in line, but Adenauer was helping to keep our other enemies in line, too.'[272]

In Khrushchev's perspective, too, significant gains had been made in Berlin and Germany. The West had 'swallowed one bitter pill'.[273] Provid-

267 *Khrushchev Remembers*, p. 53.
268 Ibid.
269 *Pravda*, 12 August 1961.
270 Ibid., 8 August 1961.
271 Ibid., 12 August 1961.
272 *Khrushchev Remembers*, p. 569.
273 This is a phrase used by Khrushchev; ibid., p. 509. The same metaphor occurs in reference to the assumptions of Khrushchev and his supporters in the Presidium of the CPSU, in Oleg Penkovsky, *The Penkovsky Papers*, transl. P. Deriabin, with an introduction and commentary by Frank Gibney and a foreword by Edward Crankshaw (London: Collins, 1965), p. 161.

ed the United States could be put under more direct pressure and confronted with a more credible threat, and its sense of vulnerability raised to the European level, conditions in Central Europe would perhaps get 'more mature', and the West might then be prepared to swallow another bitter pill. Undoubtedly, this was part of the reasoning underlying Khrushchev's attempt to improve Soviet strategic capabilities and deploy intermediate-range nuclear missiles in Cuba.

The lesson which Brezhnev and his colleagues drew from the failed venture in the Caribbean was not that military power in the nuclear age was ineffective. In their perspective even *greater efforts* had to be made to catch up with and overtake the United States in the military competition. Military power came to be regarded by them as one of the main tools with which to advance the claim to political equality with the United States and play a stronger role in global politics. In Eastern Europe, as demonstrated by the Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia in 1968, military power remained necessary for enforcing bloc discipline. And towards the Western European countries, above all West Germany, it served as an instrument with which to win acceptance of the *status quo* in Eastern Europe; establish a code of conduct in their relations with the 'socialist community' (that is, 'non-interference' in its internal affairs); and influence their domestic and foreign policies in directions favourable to the Soviet Union. In conformity with such aims, Soviet analysts later were to write that 'In conjunction with the liquidation of the strategic invulnerability of the United States, the belief of the countries of Western Europe in the so-called "nuclear guarantees" of their trans-oceanic partner was being eroded. Europe began to recognize what a catastrophe a contemporary rocket-nuclear war would be for the continent. From this stems the general interest of the Europeans to avoid a military conflict, to abstain from military-political confrontation, and to develop diverse contacts between Eastern and Western Europe.'[274]

To summarize Soviet attitudes and policies on the German problem under Khrushchev and looking ahead to the Brezhnev era, the building of the Berlin wall had alleviated East Germany's perennial manpower and currency drain, enhanced the country's economic viability, induced the population to come to terms with communist rule and improved the GDR's

274 A. O. Chubar'ian, ed., *Evropa – veka. Problemy mira i bezopasnosti* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1985), p. 135.

chances for political legitimacy. To the extent that the Soviet leaders were still concerned about possible Western challenges to its empire in Eastern Europe, they could find reassurance in the fact that the wall, and with it the post-war borders and order in Europe, were effectively guarded by the East German armed forces and border troops, with the Soviet army in the background. There was a new confidence in Moscow that was reflected in Soviet attitudes towards East-West relations. Détente in the late 1960s and early 1970s was authoritatively explained and widely believed in Moscow to be the result of significant changes in the 'correlation of world forces', meaning primarily a shift in the military balance in favour of the Soviet Union.[275] As Georgi Arbatov, one of chief theoreticians of East-West détente claimed, if the 'imperialist powers' were now becoming partners in efforts to lessen the threat of war and the normalization of relations, this was 'not because of any change in the class nature of their policy'.[276] It was because of the fact that these powers had 'to adapt their internal and foreign policies to objective realities, the new correlation of forces [which, in turn] had resulted from the activity of the Communist Party, the Soviet state, and the entire Soviet people to strengthen the economic and defense might of the country'.[277] The Kremlin leaders' new confidence as well as a new stridency was apparent also in the Soviet Union's relations with West Germany. Bonn's Ostpolitik, like détente, was seen by them as another example of the West's adaptation to the 'new realities'.

9. Soviet Responses to West Germany's Ostpolitik

In fact, the growth of Soviet military power, the consolidation of the GDR and the waning prospects of German unification did induce West Germany to modify its policies towards the East. Its standard position to the effect that any relaxation of tension and 'normalization' of relations in Europe could and should take place only as a result of German unification became untenable. Reunification, as West German policy makers now assumed, could only occur in the context of détente, not prior to it. Thus, a *modus*

275 Brezhnev's report to the Twenty-fifth CPSU Congress, *Pravda*, 25 February 1976.

276 Georgi Arbatov, 'O Sovetsko-Amerikanskikh otnosheniakh', *Kommunist*, No. 3 (1973), p. 105.

277 Ibid.

*vivend*i had to be reached first not only with the Soviet Union but also with its dependencies in Eastern Europe, including the GDR.

Policy changes, therefore, were put into effect in the period from 1966 to 1969 by the Grand Coalition government of Kurt-Georg Kiesinger (CDU) and Willy Brandt (SPD). The changes included the willingness of the federal government to enter into negotiations with all the European communist states for a 'normalization' of relations, including the establishment of diplomatic relations; consent to the establishment of contacts with the GDR at all governmental and non-governmental levels; inclusion of the GDR in an agreement on the renunciation of force; abandonment of claims that Germany continued to exist as a legal entity in the borders of 1937; and adoption of the position that the 1938 Munich agreement was concluded by the threat of force and was invalid *ex post facto*.

However, from the vantage point of the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev, Kosygin and Podgorny the policy changes were inadequate and potentially dangerous. They did not go far enough in the direction of the recognition of the GDR as a separate state but too far in encouraging the Eastern European governments to normalize political relations and benefit from the West German *Wirtschaftswunder*. The result was a campaign of severe pressure on Bonn and the attempt to isolate West Germany both in her relations towards the East and within the Western alliance. The campaign had several facets.

First, the Soviet leaders construed a 'USA-FRG axis' as a major threat to European security and world peace by declaring that 'each one of the peculiar partners conspires to use the other for its own goals', the United States using the German problem as a 'pretext with which to continue the stationing of troops in Europe and as a lever with which to influence the politics and economics of Western Europe, and the Federal Republic using the United States for the realization of its revanchist plans to change the map of Europe'.[278]

Second, French President Charles de Gaulle's NATO initiatives, France's exit from the military organization of the alliance and the ensuing Franco-Soviet rapprochement were held up as an example to follow. West Germany, in other words, should follow the French lead.

278 Brezhnev at the Twenty-third CPSU Congress, *Materialy III-ogo s"ezda KPSS* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1966), p. 26.

Third, the Soviet leaders appealed to latent anti-German attitudes in both Eastern and Western Europe, reminding the 'peoples of Europe' that there still existed a 'threat stemming from the aspirations of the West German revenge seekers'.[279]

Fourth, the Soviet leaders refused to differentiate between the major political parties in the Federal Republic. Although Brezhnev, at the Karlovy Vary Conference of European Communist and Workers' Parties in April 1967, had endorsed cooperation between communists and social democrats, in practice the SPD was excluded as a possible partner. The ideological justification used was the charge that after the promulgation of its 1958 Godesberg programme the party had fallen into the hands of 'rightist leaders'.[280]

Fifth, Moscow exploited the fact that in the period from 1966 until 1969 the nationalist *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (NPD) was able to poll more than 5 percent of the vote in the parliamentary elections in some of the German *Länder* and thereby gain representation in the state legislature. The Soviet leaders asserted not only that neo-Nazism was on the rise but also that the federal German government had 'much in common with the political aims of the neo-Nazis of all shadings'.[281]

A sixth issue turned against the West German government was Bonn's presumed quest to gain access to nuclear weapons and, related to this, its alleged refusal to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

The conclusion that Moscow drew from the alleged 'militarist', 'revanchist' and 'neo-Nazi' turn of West German politics and society was that the Federal Republic could 'not claim the same equal status' as other sovereign states.[282] It gave this argument an ominous twist by demanding, in essence, a right of intervention in West German affairs. It did so by referring to Articles 53 and 107 of the United Nations Charter which, as *leges speciales* to Article 2 (*lex generalis*), sanction coercive measures

279 Ibid., p. 27.

280 See, for instance, the analysis by V.G. Vasin, *Godesbergskaia programma SDPG. Otkrytoe otrochenie Marksizma* (Moscow: Politizdat 1963). 'Right' in the Soviet ideological frame of reference meant 'revisionist' in the direction of 'unprincipled' compromise and accommodation, and abandonment of the class struggle.

281 Soviet Government Declaration on the State of Affairs in the Federal Republic of Germany, *Neues aus der UdSSR*, Soviet embassy, Bonn, 1 February 1967.

282 Aide memoire of the Soviet Government to the Government of the German Federal Republic on the Question of Renunciation of Force, 5 July 1968, *Neues Deutschland*, 14 July 1968.

against a former enemy state of the anti-Hitler coalition. On this basis, it threatened that 'the Soviet Union together with other peace loving states is prepared, in accordance with the obligations emanating from the Potsdam Agreement and other international agreements, to take, if necessary, all the measures which arise from the state of affairs in the Federal Republic of Germany.'[283]

What, then, were the results of the propagandistic assault on Bonn? By and large, they were negligible. By 1969 it was evident that the attempt at isolating West Germany within the Western alliance had failed. De Gaulle refused to bend the Franco-Soviet *entente* into an anti-German direction. The Federal Republic adhered to its close ties with the United States while continuing to strengthen its relations with France continuing its efforts at deepening Western European integration. At the same time, the electorate was ready for a change of power in Bonn – a fact that had much to do with the internal divisions and the weakness of leadership in the CDU and changes in German society but very little with Soviet policy. As a result, any 'scientifically based' approach in Moscow sooner or later would have had to abandon the approach of circumventing and isolating the government in Bonn and refusing to deal with the main political forces in the country. Conditions in Eastern Europe were also 'ripe' for new Soviet perspectives and policies on Germany. Before the Warsaw Pact military intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, 'revisionism', reformism and the rising attractiveness of West German social democratic ideas and West German capital had posed a challenge to imperial control. The intervention, paradoxically, untied the hands of the Soviet leadership and facilitated a more favourable response to the Ostpolitik of the new coalition government of SPD and FDP, formed in October 1969.

In his inaugural address, Chancellor Willy Brandt, for the first time in the history of official government statements to the Bundestag, spoke of 'two states in Germany'. Bonn, thereby, in line with the demands put forward by Moscow and East Berlin, was taking another step towards acceptance of the post-war 'realities'. The new government, almost immediately after coming to power, also proceeded to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty. Transformation of Soviet military preponderance into political influence, stabilization of the empire and the achievement of a *modus vivendi* based on the division of Germany now appeared to be within reach

283 *Neues aus der UdSSR*, Soviet embassy, Bonn, 1 February 1967.

of Soviet policy in Europe. To accelerate the process, Brezhnev committed himself to new appraisals of West Germany by declaring that the formation of the coalition government led by the SPD represented a 'significant change in the constellation of political forces in the German Federal Republic'.[284] Similarly, the communiqué of the Warsaw Pact summit conference of December 1969 noted trends in West Germany 'directed at a realistic policy of cooperation and understanding' in Europe and characterized Bonn's signature of the non-proliferation treaty as a 'positive element'.[285]

In the course of the 1970s, West Germany fully participated in the process of East-West détente. It joined the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), concluded treaties for the normalization of relations with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, set its relationship with the GDR on a new footing, facilitated the September 1971 Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin, played an active role in arms control negotiations, such as the Mutual Balanced Forces Reductions (MBFR) talks in Vienna, provided an important impetus to East-West economic cooperation and achieved some of the highest growth rates in trade of the Western industrialized countries with the USSR. It is not surprising, therefore, that West Germany in the 1970s became an *interlocuteur privilégié* of the Soviet Union in the West.

Soviet analysts predicted that the 1970s would be a period of 'broad deployment of political forces in all directions' with a favourable outcome also for the Soviet Union because of the fact that 'the majority of the West German population maintains the position of recognizing realities and desires peace and good-neighbourly relations with all the peoples of Europe'.[286] Indeed, in retrospect, one can classify the 1970s as a golden era in Soviet-West German relations. Soviet analysts writing at the end of the decade were generous in their praise. The relations between the socialist countries and the Federal Republic in the 1970s had been an 'important factor of stability and good-neighbourliness in Europe'.[287] They pointed in

284 At a Soviet-Czechoslovak friendship meeting, *Pravda*, 29 October 1969.

285 *Pravda*, 4 December 1969.

286 D. E. Mel'nikov, 'Vneshniaia politika FRG', in *Federativnaia Respublika Germanii*, published in the series *Ekonomika i politika stran sovremmenogo kapitalizma* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodyne otnosheniia, 1974), p. 463 (italics mine).

287 See, for instance, V. Iu. Kuz'min, *Vazhnyi faktor stabil'nosti i dobrososedstva v Evrope: sotsialisticheskie strany i FRG v 70-e gody* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1980).

particular to the signing of the August 1970 Moscow treaty and its provisions on the non-use of force between the USSR and the FRG; the recognition by the FRG of the European borders and the European territorial realities created at the end of the Second World War; and her contribution to the development of détente.[288]

What, then, is the significance of this era in historical perspective? The Soviet Union and West Germany, it would seem, were engaged in a futile effort at normalizing the abnormal. It is true that some of their interests coincided. They both wanted to reduce the risk of military conflict in Central Europe. They saw benefits in the expansion of trade. Yet their goals remained fundamentally different. The Soviet Union had no intention of permitting spillovers from the improvement in political relations to the ideological sphere. Notwithstanding CSCE, Moscow continued to rule out any 'interference in the internal affairs of the socialist countries'. As the on-going military build-up and the lack of progress in the MBFR talks demonstrated, it also objected to an extension of détente to the military competition. Specifically on the German problem, it continued to insist on the idea of the existence of two separate German states, on the permanence of the post-war European borders and on West Berlin as a special entity that was not to be governed by the Federal Republic, with ties between the two entities to be kept at a minimum.

West German political leaders and public opinion, in contrast, hoped that the ideological rigidities in the Soviet bloc would soften and that both the military preponderance of the Warsaw Pact and the pace of the arms competition in Europe would be reduced. Regarding the German problem, they expected that the improvement of political relations would create favourable conditions for overcoming the division of Germany and the continent – a fact underlined by the West German government's Letter on German Unity attached to the 1970 Moscow treaty.[289] They also expected that the viability of West Berlin would be enhanced by an expansion of

288 B.M. Khalosha, *Voenno-politicheskie soiuzy imperializma: osnovnye osobennosti i tendentsiia v 70-kh – nachale 80-kh godov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1982), pp. 271-72.

289 The letter was delivered by the West German embassy in Moscow to the Soviet foreign ministry shortly before the signing of the August 1970 Soviet-West German treaty on the renunciation of force. Moscow officially acknowledged its existence only in April 1972, as the Bundestag was debating ratification of the treaty; see Michael J. Sodaro, *Moscow, Germany, and the West from Khrushchev to Gorbachev*, Studies of the Harriman Institute (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), p. 185.

contacts between the city and West Germany and by its inclusion in the country's trade agreements with the USSR and other CMEA members.

The existence of a wide chasm between Soviet and West German expectations connected with the 'normalization' of relations can be corroborated on the basis of new evidence. Two weeks prior to the signing of the Moscow treaty, and as part of the preparations for the removal of Ulbricht from the office of party chief, Brezhnev told Erich Honecker in private conversation in Moscow: 'We don't have any erroneous ideas about Brandt and West German social democracy. Illusions are out of place.' There wasn't a single example of a social democratic party having embarked on a socialist transformation, and such a development would not occur in West Germany either but even more than that, West Germany continued to aim at the transformation and liquidation of the GDR. In that respect, there was essentially

> no difference between Brandt and [Bavarian prime minister and CSU chairman Franz Josef] Strauß. Perhaps one can't put it like that now. But it is true. Both are for the capitalist system, both are for the liquidation of the GDR. Brandt is under ... pressure. He has to come to agreements with us. He hopes in this way to realize his goal in relation to the GDR, the social-democratization of the GDR.[290]

The West Germans, Brezhnev went on, 'are strong economically. They are trying to gain influence in the GDR, to swallow the GDR, one way or another.' The Soviet Union and the socialist community, however, would safeguard the results of victory in World War II. They would neither permit a development that would weaken their position in the GDR nor permit an *Anschluss* of the GDR. 'On the contrary', he (erroneously) predicted, 'the trench between the GDR and the FRG will become deeper.'[291] This prediction was tied to a normative statement: *'There is, there cannot be and it should not come to a process of rapprochement between the FRG and the GDR.'*[292]

Brezhnev made equally blunt statements about the Federal Republic's position concerning the 'special nature' of intra-German relations. Special

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290 Record of a Meeting Between L.I. Brezhnev and Erich Honecker on 28 July 1970. The document is from the Central Party Archives of the SED, publ. by Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro* [Vol. I]: *Die Akte Honecker* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), Doc. 15, p. 287.

291 Ibid., p. 287.

292 Ibid. (italics mine).

relations between the two Germanys were unacceptable. The GDR '*is part of the socialist camp. That will never be different*. What, then, is the point about the talk [in the FRG] that the GDR "cannot be a foreign country to us"? Is it [the GDR] a state that is independent from West Germany or not?'[293]

Finally, in a meeting between top leaders of the CPSU and the SED, held less than two weeks after the signing of the Moscow treaty, Brezhnev, according to the SED's archives, tried to assuage 'Comrade Walter [Ulbricht's] disquiet about West Berlin'. The Soviet party chief had told Brandt that limited compromises on the issue were possible only if two conditions were met. Brandt had to recognize, first, that 'West Berlin does not belong to the FRG and will never belong to it' and, second, that a 'political presence of the FRG in West Berlin will not be accepted'.[294]

Brezhnev's clarifications reveal an uncompromising commitment to the division of Germany. But the viability of the Soviet Union's stance on the German problem continued, in turn, to depend on the viability of the GDR. In retrospect, this was recognized by, among others, Valentin Falin, one of the chief architects of the Soviet response to Brandt's Ostpolitik. 'At the beginning of the 1970s,' he wrote, he was optimistic on that score. 'I thought that [the GDR] had reserves in order to solve the existing problems and to correct mistakes that had been committed.'[295] Brezhnev and other top Soviet leaders were of the same opinion. However, as will be shown in the next section, they were also becoming increasingly concerned about internal developments in the GDR and went as far as drawing the conclusion that Ulbricht was a satrap who was neither able to correct nor even willing to admit 'mistakes'.

293 Ibid. (italics mine).

294 Excerpts from a secret protocol on the meeting between a delegation of the CC of the CPSU and a delegation of the CC of the SED on 21 August 1970 in Moscow. The document is from the Central Party Archives of the SED, published by Peter Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro* [Vol. I]: *Die Akte Honecker* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1991), Doc. 16, p. 290.

295 Valentin Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen* (Munich: Droemer Knaur, 1993), p. 64.

10. Soviet Responses to East Germany's Assertiveness

Ulbricht regarded détente as a threat to East Germany's stability. This perception was not lessened by the fact that, after 1969, the SPD had formed a coalition government in Bonn. Whenever the SED had felt confident enough to compete with the West German Social Democrats for the hearts and minds of *all* Germans it had opened a horror chamber: the long-declared-dead *Geist des Sozialdemokratismus*, the ghost or spirit of social democracy, had risen in the GDR and haunted the communist party faithful.[296] The ghost had appeared in full view in the 1966 SPD-SED correspondence with its projected speakers' exchange and it reappeared during the 1970 visit by chancellor Willy Brandt in Erfurt, where he was given an enthusiastic welcome, foreshadowing the equally exuberant welcome that would be extended to chancellor Kohl in Dresden in December 1989.

As East-West détente began to develop in 1969, therefore, Ulbricht and other orthodox East European communist leaders were apprehensive and suspicious that the Soviet Union would move too fast and too far in its rapprochement with West Germany, thereby forcing them to participate in a process which they thought they could not easily manage.[297] In particular, there was anxiety in East Berlin that Moscow would make deals with the three Western allies and West Germany at the expense of East German interests; abandon the joint Soviet-East German demand for full recognition of the GDR under international law; fail to support the GDR in its claim to codify the status of West Berlin as an 'independent political entity'; refuse to endorse the East German quest for exclusive rights in matters concerning transit to Berlin; and continue to exercise rights on matters concerning Berlin and Germany as a whole, thus limiting East Germany sovereignty.

The East German party leader, as a consequence, tried to define the Warsaw Pact's rules of engagement with the West and bend them in a more restrictive and ideologically orthodox direction than was thought ex-

296 *Geist* in German has two meanings. It can be translated either as spirit or ghost. *Sozialdemokratismus*, in communist pejorative usage, had to be understood as a militant form of spreading social democratic ideas and policies.

297 Concerning the Soviet-East German rift in the late 1960s and early 1970s, see Gerhard Wettig, *Community and Conflict in the Socialist Camp: The Soviet Union, East Germany, and the German Problem, 1965-1972*, trans. Edwina Moreton and Hannes Adomeit (London: C. Hurst, 1975).

pedient in Moscow. He insisted that the West, and notably West Germany, meet some or all of the following conditions before any normalization of relations could take place: (1) codification of the territorial *status quo,* with the post-war borders in Europe to be declared 'immutable' (as opposed to inviolable); (2) freezing of the post-war socio-economic and political *status quo* in Europe; (3) full international legal recognition of the GDR; (4) changes in the status of West Berlin to make the city more dependent on East Germany; (5) full West German respect for a separate East German citizenship; and (6) abandonment by Bonn of its legal position that East Germans had an automatic right to West German citizenship.

As evidence from the SED's archives has confirmed, the differences between the USSR and the GDR over détente and Soviet-West German rapprochement led to a crisis of confidence in Soviet-East German relations that reached its high point in the winter of 1970 and the spring of 1971 and that was (temporarily) resolved only by the replacement of Ulbricht and the appointment of Erich Honecker as new party chief. The archives again provide fascinating insights into the thinking of the Soviet leadership regarding the German problem and the quality of relations between the imperial centre and the periphery.

Contrary to public appearances and fraternal kisses, the relationship between Brezhnev and Ulbricht was tense. In July 1970, in private conversation with Honecker, the Soviet leader even admitted to having had traumatic experiences with his (Honecker's) predecessor.

> You know, back in 1964 [at his] *dacha* [in Döllnsee], he [Ulbricht] simply move[ed] my delegation (Tikhonov and others) aside, pushe[d] me into a small room and start[ed] lecturing me about what is wrong with us and exemplary with you [East German communists]. It was hot. I was perspiring. He didn't care. I only noticed that he wanted to give me instructions as to how we must work and govern, [he didn't] even let me speak. His whole arrogance became apparent there, his disregard for the thinking and the experience of others.[298]

Brezhnev generalized from this unpleasant personal experience and lamented the tendency in East Germany to portray the GDR as 'the best

298 Record of a Meeting Between L.I. Brezhnev and Erich Honecker on 28 July 1970. The document is from the Central Party Archives of the SED, published by Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro* Vol. I, Doc. 15, p. 287. The original mixes past and present tense.

model of socialism' and to assert that 'Everything that is being done is done better in the GDR, everyone should learn from the GDR, GDR socialism exerts influence on other countries, and it does everything right'. This arrogance, he complained, was insulting to other socialist countries, Poland and Czechoslovakia, for instance, but also to the Soviet Union. 'We are concerned about this, and this has to be changed; the Politburo of the SED [and] you have to change it.'[299]

The archival record also clarifies that Brezhnev and his successors found the East German arrogance particularly irksome because of the GDR's dual dependency – economically on West Germany and in economic *and* security terms on the Soviet Union. Concerning economic affairs, as Khrushchev had already noted, the GDR was becoming more dependent on West Germany than was politically expedient. By 1970 the country was also in debt to the Soviet Union and other CMEA countries. Several members in the SED Politburo had begun to realize that Ulbricht's economic policies conducted under the heading of the New Economic System were overly ambitious. His policies, designed to catch up with and overtake West Germany in labour productivity, were predicated on an acceleration of scientific-technological progress. But the huge investments in computer technology and other advanced products and processes exceeded East Germany's resources. They failed to enhance the country's technological competitiveness or to benefit its economy. Significant distortions were the result. Consumer goods production declined. Shortages in supply occurred. The construction of housing was being curtailed.[300]

A faction in the Politburo attacked the 'high unplanned indebtedness to the CMEA countries ... and to the FRG and West Berlin' and criticized goals such as 'a 10 percent increase in labour productivity and production per annum for [the realization of which] the preconditions are in reality lacking'.[301] Reports by informants in the SED Politburo and Pyotr Abrasimov, the Soviet ambassador in East Berlin, made Brezhnev aware of the deterioration of economic conditions in the GDR. As a result, he told Honecker in private: 'For us the important thing is the strengthening of the

299 Ibid. The meaning of Brezhnev's statement was obvious. Ulbricht had to be replaced by Honecker.

300 Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro*, Vol. I, p. 103.

301 Paul Verner and Willi Stoph at the plenary meeting of the SED Central Committee, 9-10 December 1970, as quoted by Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro*, Vol. I, p. 105.

positions of the GDR, its further positive economic development, and a corresponding increase in the conditions of life of the population [and] the working class of the GDR. One should concentrate on these tasks.'[302] He obviously thought that Honecker would be more willing and better prepared to realize them.

Brezhnev's second major irritation was connected with a paradox of imperial control. The periphery may completely be dependent on the centre for protection but the provincial governor may nevertheless act contrary to the centre's preferences and even refuse to carry out instructions. This typically raises the problem of choosing a suitable successor. The centre's emissaries then tend to get embroiled in the domestic power struggles at the periphery. A case in point is Moscow's involvement in Ulbricht's 'resignation' from his position as first party secretary and his retirement to the more ceremonial role as president (*Vorsitzender des Staatsrats*).

Expressing his irritation with Ulbricht, the Soviet party leader assured would-be successor Honecker: 'I tell you quite openly that it will not be possible for him to govern by leaving us out and to take ill-conceived steps against you and other comrades in the Politburo.[303] Clearly with a view to a possible replacement of Ulbricht with Honecker, he reminded the latter of the GDR's complete dependency on the USSR for protection: "*We have troops [stationed] with you [in the GDR]. Erich, I tell you frankly, and never forget this: The GDR cannot exist without us, without the S[oviet] U[nion], its power and strength. Without us there is no GDR.* '[304]

It was not only the centre but also Moscow's emissaries in East Berlin who got directly involved in the power struggle. As reported by Yuli Kvitsinsky (then a foreign ministry official at the Soviet embassy in Bonn and later an active participant in the quadripartite negotiations on Berlin, with a previous appointment in East Berlin), ambassador Pyotr Abrasimov was in the picture regarding the struggle for power in the highest echelon of the East German leadership. His relations with Honecker and his supporters had become close over time, and he was kept up to date about all steps taken. This was no secret to the other members of the SED Politburo

302 Record of the Brezhnev-Honecker meeting of 28 July 1970, Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro*, Vol. I, Doc. 15, p. 284.
303 Ibid., p. 281.
304 Ibid. (italics mine).

and it conveyed the impression that a possible change of power would take place at least with Moscow's silent approval.[305]

However, some members of the Politburo in Moscow were against Ulbricht's replacement. The then Chairman of the Supreme Soviet, Nikolai Podgorny, is said to have voiced especially strong opposition to such a step. Brezhnev, too, despite all his complaints about Ulbricht, was still hesitant about having him removed from office, stating at a meeting between high ranking officials of the SED and the CPSU in mid-August 1970 that 'We have recently received several signals and rumours that, let us say, frictions and quarrels have arisen in your Politburo.' However, he saw as yet 'no reason for change'. Instead, he appealed to the SED to strengthen the 'collective' and the 'unity of leadership', and he told Ulbricht and his colleagues to work out their differences – who, in turn, promised that they would behave.[306] Dark clouds were thus brewing over Abrasimov's head. Kvitsinsky realized this when Gromyko, who was otherwise cautious on personnel issues, once unexpectedly said in his presence that he had apparently been mistaken about Abrasimov, personally and politically. Instead of carrying out the line of the CPSU Central Committee, the ambassador had participated in completely inappropriate intrigues, for which he would have to answer.[307]

The scales, nevertheless, began to tilt in Honecker's favor. This was caused in part by massive attacks against Ulbricht from inside the SED and ultimately direct appeals to Brezhnev to get rid of him. In January 1971, the oppositional faction complained in a letter to the Soviet leader that Ulbricht had reneged on all the promises on party unity made in August. In domestic politics as well as on the GDR's policies towards the FRG, they said, 'Comrade Walter is pursuing a personal line to which is he clinging stubbornly'. At 78 years of age, anyone would have difficulty to manage things effectively, the charges continued, but in his case the age problem was compounded by a 'difficult personality'. Ulbricht displayed

305 Julij A. Kwizinskij [Yuli A. Kvitsinsky], *Vor dem Sturm: Erinnerungen eines Diplomaten* (Berlin: Siedler, 1993), p. 255. Kvitsinsky served from 1959 until 1965 in the Soviet embassy in the GDR and from 1978 until 1981 in the embassy in Bonn.

306 Secret protocol of the meeting between a delegation of the CC of the CPSU and a delegation of the CC of the SED on 21 August 1970 in Moscow. The document is from the Central Party Archives of the SED, published by Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro,* Vol. I, Doc. 16, pp. 292-93.

307 Kwizinskij, *Vor dem Sturm*, pp. 255-56.

ever more 'irrational ideas and subjectivism'. In his attitudes and behaviour towards 'comrades in the Politburo and other comrades he is often rude, insulting, and discusses things from a position of infallibility'.[308]

The combined pressure of his colleagues in East Berlin and finally from Moscow persuaded Ulbricht to throw in the towel. On 3 May 1971, he asked the plenum of the Central Committee of the SED to relieve him of the duties of first secretary, referring to his old age which had made it impossible for him to continue his work on behalf of the Central Committee, the party and the people. In accordance with what he knew to be the Soviet preference, he proposed Honecker as his successor.

Soviet dissatisfaction with Ulbricht and his removal from office are symptomatic of another problem of imperial rule: the aversion of the centre to recognize the existence of basic structural deficiencies of empire and to blame subordinate bureaucrats and local officials for problems in their nominal sphere of responsibility. But the supreme irony of Ulbricht's replacement is that Honecker proved to engage in the same 'mistakes' and turned out to be, in the centre's perspective, just as 'subjectivist', arrogant, assertive, recalcitrant and, in the end, unmanageable as his predecessor.

This was not immediately apparent. The first two to three years after Honecker had assumed office passed without much conflict. As Kvitsinsky pertinently observed, Honecker made a significant contribution to the Quadripartite Agreement on Berlin concluded on 3 September 1971. He was flexible but vigorous in his negotiations with West Germany. He supported the idea of socialist integration in the CMEA framework.[309] On domestic issues, one month into his rule – at the Eighth congress of the SED in June 1971 – he submitted a far-reaching program of change to improve the material situation of the population. Incomes of GDR citizens grew by four percent annually. Minimum wages and pensions were increased; paid working holidays and maternity leave were extended; an extensive new housing programme was initiated, and so was the construction of numer-

308 Letter by 13 full and candidate members of the SED Politburo to Brezhnev, dated 21 January 1971. The document is from the Central Party Archives of the SED, as published by Przybylski, *Tatort Politbüro,* Vol. I, Doc. 17, pp. 297-303. The wording is very much reminiscent of what Lenin had to say about Stalin in his 'testament', a collection of notes and letters written before his death.

309 Kwizinskij, *Vor dem Sturm*, p. 258.

ous sports facilities and public buildings. Industrial plants that had become outdated were to be renovated as soon as possible.[310]

Yet despite the protective shield of the Berlin wall and the apparent success of his socio-economic programs, Honecker for several years to come remained conscious of East Germany's insecurity, vulnerability and lack of domestic legitimacy. This realization as well as East Germany's inferior status *vis-à-vis* West Germany and its international isolation made Honecker almost pathologically bent on securing unconditional Soviet support. He expressly asked Brezhnev to view the GDR *de facto* as a Union Republic of the USSR and as such to include it in the Soviet Union's economic plans.[311] He was not content merely with a 'close partnership USSR-GDR' but had the GDR declare itself, in Article 6 of its 1974 constitution, to be 'forever and irrevocably allied' to the Soviet Union and to commit itself, in article 1 of the 1975 treaty of alliance with the Soviet Union, to maintaining 'relations of eternal and unbreakable friendship and fraternal mutual assistance'. The reference in the previous GDR constitution to 'two German states of [one] German nation' had made it unnecessary to emphasize the specific character of the relations between both German states in each and every Soviet-German or intra-German treaty. Now, however, the substitution of this formula with 'eternal friendship' with the Soviet Union, as Falin later was to comment, was 'stupidity bordering on provocation' because the political logic of this change was that anyone striving for a united, free, and democratic, rather than a Soviet-type Germany allied with the Soviet Union had to oppose the 'special' Soviet-East German relationship.[312]

But then, in the eyes of Soviet policy makers in the 1970s and early 1980s, the new political logic was perfectly acceptable. The consolidation of the empire seemed to require eradication of all ideas about German unification now considered politically harmful, no matter whether under capitalist, socialist or any other auspices. The new rationale was demonstrated by an exchange between Falin and foreign minister Gromyko in 1977. Falin had pointed out to his superior that it was unproductive to emphasize the theme of 'two German states' and unprincipled to abandon the vision of a united socialist Germany. The criticism was rejected. Gromyko re-

310 Ibid., on actual and intended changes in the GDR economy.
311 Ibid.
312 Falin, *Politische Erinnerungen*, p. 238.

marked that '*We don't need a united Germany at all, not even a socialist one. The united socialist China is enough for us.*'[313]

The honeymoon in the relationship between the Soviet leaders and Honecker, however, was destined to come to an end. The first of many reasons is connected with a generational change and the background of the new leadership in East Berlin. To quote Kvitsinsky again because of his well-informed perspective, he had long observed that in the GDR the group of the so-called 'KZ people' (*KZler*, derived from *Konzentrationslager*) was pressing for power. These were party officials who had spent the Hitler era neither in capitals of unoccupied Europe nor in quiet Comintern offices in Moscow but in the concentration camps and prisons of the Third Reich. Latent tensions had always existed between them and the emigrants. Honecker was a typical representative of the *KZler* who, in contrast to Moscow emigrants such as Ulbricht and Pieck, were less inclined to place allegiance to Moscow above the interests of their own country. That is why, among other reasons, he was more popular than Ulbricht with the younger SED officials of the second rank, who had gradually ascended to leadership positions at the district and regional levels and who were now moving into the central party organs. One of the indications of this change in the make-up of the party leadership lay in the fact that Honecker, after his appointment as party chief, was single-mindedly surrounding himself with former FDJ cadres. From Moscow's vantage point, therefore, there was a distinct possibility that the policies of the GDR would be determined to a greater degree than before by tendencies of national patriotism and claims for a more independent role in intra-bloc and international affairs.[314]

There was another aspect of Honecker's biography that was to cause concern in Moscow. Honecker was born on 25 August 1912 in Neunkirchen in the *Land* Saarland in the south-western part of Germany, the son of a miner. At the tender age of ten, pressured by his father, he entered the communist youth organization there. He did not do well at school, failed to receive a decent apprenticeship position, went to work for a time as a farm labourer in Pomerania, returned to the Saarland to work as a roofer for his uncle, turned professional communist youth organizer and then rose through the ranks to become a leading member of a KPD district

313 Ibid., p. 239 (italics mine).
314 Kwizinskij, *Vor dem Sturm*, pp. 256-257.

committee in that *Land*.[315] Although, according to Marxist theory, ethnic, regional, or national attributes are secondary to class characteristics, Honecker's background could be interpreted as establishing an-all German predisposition. Such assumptions turned out to be correct. Furthermore, as will be shown in the next chapter, his background was part of his unbending desire to visit West Germany, to return to the places where he had worked as a youth, and to see the grave of his father.[316] From the Soviet perspective, therefore, the combination of a latent tendency to assert GDR interests and an all-German longing for *Heimat* produced a psychological profile whose political repercussions were unpredictable and perhaps difficult to control.

Before this eventuality became reality, it turned out that Honecker's economic programme was no less ambitious and impossible to realize than that of his predecessor. Kvitsinsky aptly describes the attendant deterioration in economic conditions and the downturn in Soviet-GDR political relations.

> [W]e received information [in the early to mid-1970s] that the GDR consumed much more than it was able to produce. The result of this development was a rapid increase of the state's foreign debt, which under Ulbricht had remained within acceptable limits. But cautious warnings from Moscow had no effect on Honecker. He explained to us that in today's world only fools would not take up loans, that the GDR had significant reserves of gold and foreign currency, and that it had a broad range of possibilities to increase its exports for freely convertible currency.
> Soon, however, it turned out that almost the entire export growth of the GDR was used up to service the loans that had already been taken up. Many of the GDR's economists sounded the alarm but no one in the Central Committee of the SED seemed to value their opinion. The GDR now needed such goods from the West as the Soviet Union could not deliver. The Soviet admonitions to be frugal also went largely unheeded: After international recognition and the normalization of its relations with the Federal Republic, the GDR with Honecker at the top, now wanted to venture out independently onto the stormy sea of international politics. After all, why not? Was the GDR inferior to Poland or Czechoslovakia?[317]

315 See the biographies by Heinz Lippman, *Honecker: Portrait eines Nachfolger*s (Cologne: Wissenschaft und Politik, 1971) and Dieter Borkowski, *Erich Honecker: Statthalter Moskaus oder deutscher Patriot? Eine Biografie* (Munich: C. Bertelsmann, 1987).

316 Interview with Krenz.

317 Kwizinskij, *Vor dem Sturm*, pp. 258-59.

In late 1974, Soviet officials learned that East Berlin had worked out a package of agreements with Bonn to the effect that the GDR should receive several million West German marks for the improvement of the connections between West Berlin and the Federal Republic and for an expansion of contacts between the population of both German states. This concerned, among other things, the construction or rebuilding of roads, the opening of new telephone lines, and the cession of small parts of East German territory to West Berlin. All this, as Kvitsinsky observed,

> made the impression of a very adroit political and commercial deal. The GDR modernized its roads with its own personnel and was paid for it in foreign currency by Bonn. The GDR improved its telephone network and again the Federal Republic was ready to pay for it. And a whole series of similar deals was in preparation: the modernization not only of the road system but also the railway links, the opening of additional checkpoints on the border with the Federal Republic and the expansion of the already existing ones, the facilitation of tourist trips of West Germans into the GDR and of visits to relatives, the authorization of money transfers, and the lifting of restrictions on postal parcels. For many of these projects the GDR received the money from Bonn in advance, so that it was bound to keep its pledges. Ulbricht's thesis of the strict separation (*Abgrenzung*) of both German states was practically buried quietly. The GDR claimed the right to play a ground-breaking role in the normalization of human relations between Eastern and Western Europe.

The budding relationship between the two Germanys was carefully monitored in Moscow and caused concern that would not cease until the collapse of East Germany. To continue with Kvitsinsky's account:

> Andrei Gromyko viewed this turn in the policy of our German friends with great doubts from the very start. Although its internal stability, due to the national division, was substantially less than that of our other allies, the GDR ventured out far in comparison to the Soviet Union and the other countries of the Warsaw Treaty. It was clear that Bonn would only invest in the GDR in order to advance the political goal of the development of German domestic special relations, that is, to achieve the "change through rapprochement" that Brandt and Bahr had already conceived in 1963.
> And one more completely new element in the policy of the GDR aroused suspicion in Moscow: The entire package of agreements with the Federal Republic had been negotiated without consultations with Moscow. Basically, we had simply been presented with a *fait accompli*.[318] ...
> Gromyko attempted to bring about a top-level dialogue with the GDR on this whole complex of questions. However, when Honecker heard what it was about, he avoided meeting with Brezhnev. In January 1975, he sent a delega-

318 Ibid., pp. 259-60.

> tion to Moscow that was led by [SED] Politburo member Hermann Axen, who was in charge of international relations.
> The talk led to nothing. Gromyko expounded the Soviet doubts quite directly and openly and indicated that the Soviet general staff had a negative opinion of the measures planned by "the friends" in regard to ensuring the security of the GDR. But what was the reply of Axen who had been sent expressly because no one wanted to change anything in the agreements that had already been signed and made public most hurriedly? He raised up his short arms, appeared insulted by the mistrust of the "Soviet friends" toward the policy of the GDR, praised the agreements and their advantages for the GDR, and swore that in regard to the German question there would always be only a policy closely coordinated with the Soviet Union.[319]

The stage for a serious crisis in Soviet-East German relations had irrevocably been set. Its proportions were far to exceed the scale of the conflict that had existed in the Ulbricht era. The gravity of basic policy disagreements was compounded by other factors of a more 'technical' nature. One was the fact that Honecker attempted to conceal from his colleagues in the Politburo all the reservations and warnings conveyed to him from Moscow, transferring them to his personal files.[320] Another was the fact that the Kremlin had informants in the SED Politburo who reported that Honecker spoke more and more disparagingly about Brezhnev and the Soviet Union. The bad-mouthing behind the top Soviet leader's back increased the resentment towards Honecker felt in Moscow.[321]

In 1976-78, careful and, as events were to confirm, entirely accurate analyses of the internal situation of the GDR were prepared in the Soviet foreign ministry with the participation of the KGB and the defense ministry. The studies predicted a rapid development of relations between both German states and a growing dependence of East Germany on West Germany. The authors anticipated that the Protestant Church would become the crystallization point of opposition forces and warned that the structures of the party, the army, and state security, which on the surface appeared to be reliable and stable, were in reality swiftly eroding.[322]

Why, then, did the Soviet leadership under Brezhnev fail to react more forcefully? One of the reasons is connected with internal factors. The 'era of stagnation' (*zastoy*) seriously affected the top levels of decision making

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319 Ibid., pp. 260-61.
320 Ibid., pp. 262-63. Further examples of such concealment of information will be provided in the next chapter.
321 Ibid., p. 263.
322 Ibid., pp. 264-65.

– a weakness that was enhanced by Brezhnev's failing health. Even more importantly, what were the Soviet options? Economic pressures would have had negative repercussions on a deteriorating Soviet economy. Such measures, furthermore, were likely to push the GDR even more quickly into the arms of West Germany. Finally, Honecker's closest followers were now in leading positions in the party, government, and state security. There was no oppositional faction on which Moscow could rely. Finally, in contrast to Ulbricht, it was difficult to imagine that Honecker would co-operate in his removal from office. The imperial centre was beginning to lose control.

In the period from the late 1970s to the mid-1980s, this predicament of empire coincided with a serious crisis in all dimensions of Soviet power. As will be shown in the next chapter, the failures of Soviet policies on the German problem were both a cause and a symptom of a deepening overall crisis of the Marxist-Leninist and Imperial paradigm.