A Failed Empire

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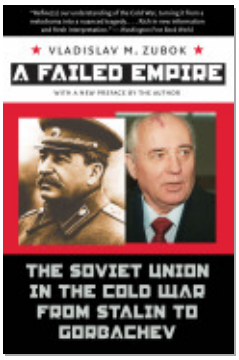

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(CHAPTER 4)

KREMLIN POLITICS AND "PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE," 1953–1957

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Around the end of 1955, Molotov instructed one of his staff members to find among Lenin's writings some reference to the idea that naïveté in foreign policy was tantamount to a crime. Obviously, the idea was to use such a quotation against Khrushchev.
—Recollections of Oleg Troyanovsky, Soviet diplomat

The position of Molotov is erroneous, profoundly mistaken, and does not correspond to the interests of our state.
—Gromyko, on Molotov's diplomacy at the July 1955 Party Plenum

After Stalin's death, a "new" Soviet foreign policy emerged that sought to reopen the diplomatic space that Moscow had enjoyed before the start of the Cold War. In February 1956, at the Twentieth Party Congress, the Soviet leadership renounced expectations of imminent war. The Stalinist thesis of the inevitability of a period of wars and revolutions gave way to a new thesis: long-term "peaceful coexistence" and nonmilitary competition between the capitalist and Communist systems.

However, détente in East-West relations did not occur. And, in fact, the Cold War got a second wind. Mutual fears and mistrust remained high between the two opposing blocs. Some Soviet memoirists give the opinion that the lack of a flexible and positive Western response to the new Soviet foreign policy was a missed opportunity to reduce Cold War tensions.[1] Indeed, President Dwight D. Eisenhower, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, and the majority of American Kremlin-watchers regarded the changes in the Kremlin and the new Soviet diplomatic flexibility not as an opportunity but as a threat. American policy makers were concerned that the rhetoric of "peaceful coexistence" could disrupt their plans to build up a European center of power, which, together with Great Britain, would bear the burden of "containing" the Soviet bloc. Domestic politics and the

culture of anti-Communism contributed to the reluctance of the Eisenhower administration to negotiate with the Soviet Union.[2]

A closer look at the Soviet side reveals that it was also not ready for negotiations and compromises. New documents reveal that many of the Kremlin rulers, despite the shift to peaceful coexistence, retained some basic elements of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm and continuity with Stalin's foreign policy. The new Kremlin rulers were eager to reassert the Soviet position as a global revolutionary leader and began to build alliances with revolutionary-nationalist leaders and groups in the Middle East, South and Southeast Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The new documents also demonstrate that the relationships among Stalin's successors in 1953–57 had a significant impact on the Kremlin's decision making regarding Soviet policies within the bloc as well as toward the United States and its allies. Soviet politics after Stalin's death favored revolutionary-imperial discourse—it was politically suicidal to be seen as soft on Western imperialism. The members of the collective leadership competed among themselves to win support among the party and state elites, offering strategies of strengthening and expanding Soviet power and international influence.[3]

WHO WILL TALK TO THE WEST?

The Kremlin oligarchs who assumed power after Stalin's death in March 1953 and proclaimed the collective leadership were the ultimate survivors.[4] They had learned to wage a permanent struggle for their positions between the suspicious tyrant and the army of lesser-rank party and state officials, the political nomenklatura that looked up to them with both reverence and envy. Throughout his regime, Stalin ensured that no oligarch felt secure at any time. At the Party Plenum in October 1952, Stalin denounced Molotov and Mikoyan as traitors and possibly Western spies. Simultaneously, he dramatically expanded the Politburo (it now became the Presidium), including in it a large group of younger party officials, probably a threat that Stalin could at any time replace his old lieutenants with younger bureaucrats.[5]

The oligarchs also learned to respond to Stalin's machinations and rule in his absence. After the murderous "Leningrad affair," the oligarchic pact of mutual tolerance deepened.[6] Even before Stalin died, the oligarchs cut all the nooses he had put around their necks. Molotov and Mikoyan regained their power over foreign policy and trade; the "Mingrelian affair," a corruption investigation in Georgia directed against Beria, was cancelled; and the younger nomenklatura members were excluded from the Presidium. At the decisive moment of power transfer, their common interest in survival overrode individual rivalries and pol-

icy disagreements. Some oligarchs genuinely feared that any disunity would lead to the loss of control and the caving in to external pressures.[7]

Oligarchic rule, due to its consensual nature, rarely favors innovation and change. Yet, as we saw in the previous chapter, the collective leadership moved with alacrity to adopt new domestic and foreign policies. The oligarchs lacked legitimacy and needed to demonstrate their initiative and determination at home and abroad. Next to the towering images and statues of Stalin, the collective leadership did not look terribly impressive. Moscow professor Sergei Dmitriev wrote in his diary of his impressions at seeing the collective leadership on a home TV set in November 1955: "The entire Presidium consists of boring and grey personalities. When one sees them, it comes to mind that the revolution had occurred long, long ago, all revolutionary cadres were exterminated, and bureaucratic nonentities triumphed. There is nothing live, spontaneous, and humane in what they say, not a word, not a single memorable gesture. Everybody looks featureless, faceless, and erased. One only misses the inscription at the entrance to Dante's Inferno."[8]

Stalin's successors could not rule by terror and had to win the support of party officials, the military, the secret police, and other state bureaucracies. In the party and bureaucracy, everybody knew that collective leadership was a transitional phase of Kremlin politics; one of the oligarchs would eventually have to become the winner in the coming succession struggle. An editor of the leading literary journal expressed this mood in his diary: "Collective leadership—and what about the conductor?"[9]

After Beria's arrest, Khrushchev quickly moved into the position of conductor. Malenkov, however, remained the chairman of the Council of Ministers, a position of high visibility. Many in the country continued to regard him as Stalin's successor. Speaking to the Supreme Soviet on August 8, 1953, Malenkov announced several sensational policies to radically improve the living standards of Soviet people within "the next two or three years." For the first time since 1928, the state pledged to increase investments in agriculture and the consumer-related economy at the expense of the military-industrial complex and the machine-building sector. Malenkov also announced the reduction by half of stifling agricultural taxes, as well as the increase in the size of peasant household and private plots. These measures almost doubled the disposable income of the peasantry within one year. Serious problems with food continued to plague the USSR, but at least peasants stopped cutting down their orchards and killing their cows to avoid exorbitant property taxes. Instead, they again began to sell meat and milk in marketplaces. Malenkov became their favorite leader since Lenin, as *muzhiks*

across Russia drank to his health the glasses filled to the brim with village moonshine.[10]

In his speech, Malenkov also made the dramatic announcement that the USSR had its own hydrogen bomb. Soviet nuclear physicists, including one of the inventors of the bomb, Andrei Sakharov, listened to Malenkov's speech at the testing ground in Kazakhstan with mixed feelings of pride and anxiety. In fact, the bomb would be successfully tested a week later. The announcement had the desired effect on the public; Malenkov appeared as the leader of a nuclear superpower, both in the eyes of foreign leaders and in those of the domestic audience.[11] Khrushchev interpreted this speech as an attempt at personal popularity at his expense. He especially could never forget or forgive Malenkov for usurping his role as a major spokesman for the peasants and for agricultural affairs. In September 1953, Khrushchev took back this role at the Party Plenum convened to approve new agricultural policies. Five months later, he convened another plenum and presented there the plan for cultivating virgin lands in Kazakhstan, a grand program promising a quick end to the chronic food crisis. This turned out to be a costly ecological disaster, but, as William Taubman wrote, "in the meantime he was displaying the leadership that Malenkov lacked."[12]

In September 1953, Khrushchev became the Communist Party's first secretary. Poorly educated, crude, and volatile, and at the same time earthly, accessible, quick-witted, and enormously energetic, Khrushchev appealed to the peasant-stock Soviet officials as "one of their own." While Malenkov criticized the party control over economic and cultural matters and sought to broaden his base among industrial managers and scientific and cultural elites, Khrushchev quickly established full command over the party structures and the secret police, now called the Committee for State Security (KGB). His crony Ivan Serov, former emissary of Stalin's secret police in Poland and East Germany, became the first KGB chairman. Khrushchev used these sinews of power to push Malenkov out of the limelight, cut his access to information, and even blackmail him by disclosing his role in implementation of the nefarious "Leningrad affair." Even Malenkov's personal chancery became part of the central party apparatus controlled by Khrushchev. Khrushchev chaired the Presidium and dominated in public appearances of the collective leadership.[13]

The succession struggle in the era of the Cold War involved the question of international leadership. The Soviet political class and a wide segment of Soviet citizens regarded statesmanship as an almost supernatural quality. Who among the collective leadership would try to wear Stalin's mantle of world statesman and talk to the leaders of other great powers? Who would combine perceptiveness,

wisdom, and an understanding of long-term world trends to defend Soviet interests in the international arena? The winner in the Kremlin games would not only gain absolute control over the enormous party and state bureaucracy; he would lead the Communist world and "progressive humanity" in a fierce struggle with the capitalist world.

An early summit, as proposed by Winston Churchill in May 1953, might have undermined Molotov's seniority in foreign affairs and put Malenkov as the head of state into the international limelight. By the end of 1954, however, Malenkov's window of opportunity was closing fast. Khrushchev began to argue before the other Presidium members that Malenkov would not be tough enough to succeed in future negotiations with the West. This argument justified Malenkov's removal on January 22, 1955, from the post of chairman of the Council of Ministers. The Party Plenum approved this decision nine days later.[14]

At the plenum, Khrushchev and Molotov for the first time revealed to the party elite that Malenkov had supported Beria on "selling" the GDR in May 1953. Khrushchev told the plenum that in the spring of 1953 he "used to say to other comrades, in particular to comrade Molotov: now Churchill is so terribly eager to have a meeting and I, honestly, fear that if he comes to meet face to face with Malenkov, then Malenkov may get cold feet and surrender." The bottom line was clear: the premier lacked backbone and therefore could not represent the Soviet Union at a summit with capitalist leaders. In his memoirs, Khrushchev is blunt: "We had to replace Malenkov. The talks in Geneva required another kind of person."[15] It turned out that only Khrushchev himself was that kind of person.

Khrushchev, professing to be loyal to the collective leadership principle, refused to combine the positions of first secretary and chairman of the Council of Ministers. Instead, he proposed his friend, Minister of Defense Nikolai Bulganin, for the latter position.[16] This choice demonstrated the hypocrisy of Khrushchev's earlier criticism of Malenkov: the new head of government cut a notoriously weak figure. Stalin considered him a harmless enough personality to entrust him with the armed forces (the *vozhd* preferred to give such crucial power to a weak character, fearing a potential Bonaparte). With a partner like this, Khrushchev's leadership would not be challenged. At the same time, in February 1955, Khrushchev acquired another crucial position as the head of the Supreme Defense Council, a permanent body in charge of defense matters and the armed forces. Among the council's members were the new minister of defense, Marshal Georgy Zhukov, a staunch ally of Khrushchev, and Vyacheslav Malyshev, the head of the Ministry for the Medium Machine-Building, a name invented for camouflage and meaning the nuclear complex. In effect, Khrushchev became the commander in chief of the Soviet Union.[17] From this point on, this power position would be inherited by

subsequent general secretaries of the party, from Leonid Brezhnev to Mikhail Gorbachev.

His new power base allowed Khrushchev to interfere in foreign affairs and security policies, fields he was unfamiliar with. Earlier he had opposed some elements of the "peace offensive" because they bore the imprimatur of his rivals. Now he began to return to some of Beria's and Malenkov's foreign policy initiatives that he had earlier branded as treasonous. This opened the way for the most productive, reformist, and moderate phase in Soviet foreign policy in years. Yet, for a while, the Kremlin oligarchs continued to function as the collective leadership. Anastas Mikoyan, without leadership ambitions of his own, played a useful role as a trusted and loyal mentor of the first secretary on foreign affairs. Also, as historian Elena Zubkova observes, "Malenkov, a man of compromise, counterbalanced the impulsive and brusque Khrushchev." Presidium newcomers Zhukov, Matvei Saburov, and Mikhail Pervukhin actively participated in the decision-making process on foreign affairs.[18]

Molotov, however, remained the staunchest conservative critic of the foreign policy initiatives now pushed by Khrushchev. Since the fall of 1954, Molotov and Khrushchev had stood on opposite sides on almost every single issue, from the virgin lands to control over defense issues.[19] The struggle for supremacy between the two began in earnest during the talks on Austrian neutrality during February–April 1955. The Austrian government feared sharing the fate of the divided Germany and approached the Kremlin with an offer to negotiate a separate agreement on the end of Soviet occupation.[20] Molotov argued against it. "We cannot afford to withdraw Soviet troops from Austria," echoed a secret memorandum from senior diplomats in November 1953, "since it would actually mean placing Austria in the hands of the Americans and weakening our positions in Central and South Central Europe." Khrushchev, by contrast, argued that Austrian neutrality would weaken NATO, and the Presidium majority agreed with him. After the Soviet-Austrian agreement was reached, the triumphant first secretary took advantage of an informal moment at a reception to shake his finger at Molotov's deputies from the Foreign Ministry. From now on, he said, they had to take the cues not from their boss but from "the Party leadership."[21]

The visit of the Soviet official delegation to Yugoslavia (May 26–June 2, 1955) dealt a final blow to Molotov's role in foreign affairs. Khrushchev, Bulganin, and Georgy Zhukov, now minister of defense, wanted to repair the Soviet-Yugoslav split and were ready to apologize for Stalin's anti-Tito campaign in 1948–1953. They believed that a rapprochement with Yugoslavia would bring this country back into the Soviet sphere and enhance Moscow's geopolitical positions in Southern Europe and the Balkans. In Molotov's view, however, the Tito regime

would never be a responsible partner of the USSR. Armed with quotations from Lenin's works, Molotov claimed that anyone praising the Yugoslav leadership "could not be a Leninist." Molotov doggedly fought against this trip and was not even included in the delegation.[22] The crux of the matter became who, Molotov or Khrushchev, would define what a "Leninist" meant in foreign policy. The gaping rift in the Presidium forced Khrushchev to turn to the plenum of the Central Committee for support against the obstinate foreign minister.

The Party Plenum took place on July 4–12, 1955, on the eve of the Geneva conference with the leaders of the United States, Great Britain, and France—the first summit of the great powers in ten years. The plenum turned out to be a remarkably frank discussion of Soviet foreign policy and its underlying motives. For the first time, Presidium oligarchs shared with the broader party and state elites the intimate details of Kremlin politics. Khrushchev knew that in the eyes of these elites Molotov was the man who had worked with Lenin and Stalin. He and his supporters, therefore, chose to attack Molotov's professional and Bolshevik authority.

Khrushchev cited in great detail the Presidium debates on the Austrian question. Molotov, he said, absurdly claimed that there could be another *Anschluss* of Austria by West Germany. He insisted that the Soviet Union must reserve the right to reintroduce its troops into Austria.[23] The Yugoslav Question touched on the ideological core of the Soviet view of the Cold War. The Kremlin's decision to recognize Yugoslavia as "truly socialist" meant that Stalin's policies were wrong and that Moscow's absolute authority to lead the Communist camp could be questioned. Molotov viewed this as the beginning of a dangerous slippery slope for world Communism and Soviet supremacy. His main thesis was that the Yugoslav version of "nationally oriented socialism" could spread to other Communist parties. Molotov warned that this could lead to the loss of Moscow's control over Poland and other countries of Eastern Europe.[24]

Molotov's resistance to the rapprochement with Yugoslavia, Khrushchev and his allies asserted, proved that the foreign minister had become dogmatic and did not understand Soviet security interests. Bulganin told the assembly that Yugoslavia returning to the Soviet bloc would give the Soviet army and navy excellent positions on the Adriatic Sea. Soviet forces then would be able to threaten "the vital lines of communications of the Anglo-American military forces," including the Suez Canal. Khrushchev reinforced these arguments."[25]

Before this plenum, the Soviet leaders blamed the Soviet-Yugoslav split of 1948 on "the Beria-Abakumov gang" (Viktor Abakumov was the head of SMERSH and MGB).[26] But during the plenum, Khrushchev suddenly remarked that the responsibility for the Soviet-Yugoslav split fell "on Stalin and Molotov." A remarkably frank exchange followed:

MOLOTOV: That's new. We signed the letter [to the Yugoslavs] on behalf of the Central Committee.

KHRUSHCHEV: Without asking the Central Committee.

MOLOTOV: This is not true.

KHRUSHCHEV: This is exactly true.

MOLOTOV: Now you can say whatever comes into your head.

KHRUSHCHEV: I am a member of the Presidium, but no one asked for my opinion.[27]

The split with Yugoslavia, Khrushchev told the delegates, was only one in the series of costly errors that Stalin and Molotov had made after 1945. In a startling assertion, the first secretary suggested that these errors may have helped to trigger the Cold War. "We started the Korean war and even now still have to sort things out." "Who needed that war?" asked Khrushchev rhetorically. Khrushchev's impromptu barb was so provocative that it was edited out of the printed version of the plenum transcripts.[28]

At the plenum, Molotov was deposed as an authority in foreign affairs, although he remained the foreign minister until June 1956. From now on the mantle of senior statesman passed to Khrushchev. For a while, Khrushchev still felt uncertain about this new role and sought to share responsibility with others. The delegation to the Geneva summit of four great powers in July 1955 consisted of Bulganin as the formal head, Khrushchev, Molotov, and Zhukov. Publicly they behaved as a group of equals. Eisenhower and other Western politicians, however, quickly figured out that Khrushchev was the real boss. From now on they knew whom the West should talk to in the Kremlin.

"NEW FOREIGN POLICY"

The Kremlin oligarchs observed the world through the lenses inherited from Stalin. Like Stalin, they felt inferior and insecure in relation to the United States. From their vantage point, the Americans were busy encircling the USSR with military bases and installing pro-American regimes (the coup of August 1953 in Iran that removed Dr. Mohammad Mossadeq from power was just one example). They also knew that John Foster Dulles hoped that the unrelenting pressure on the USSR after Stalin's death would "lead to disintegration" of Soviet domination over the countries of Central Europe.[29] Troyanovsky recalled that "Khrushchev constantly feared that the United States would compel the Soviet Union and its allies to retreat in some region of the world."[30]

At the same time, the new leaders drew different conclusions from their obser-

vations. Khrushchev, Molotov, Malenkov, and other oligarchs recognized what Stalin, in his hubris, could not. From the Berlin blockade to the Korean War, Soviet policies created fears of a Soviet blitzkrieg among Western Europeans and thus laid the foundation for NATO. Now the Soviet leaders wanted to dismantle this foundation, reduce anti-Soviet fears among the middle classes of Western Europe, and encourage pacifist elements within NATO member countries.

The failure of Molotov's diplomacy during 1954 triggered a rethinking of Soviet international behavior in the Kremlin. After a majority of Communists and Gaullists in the French Assembly wrecked the plans for the "European Army" (European Defense Community), NATO members agreed on November 23, 1954, in Paris to accept West Germany as a new member. This move firmly anchored West Germany in the Western alliance. The need for a new foreign policy in Europe became evident to the Kremlin leadership.[31] The incomplete record of the Kremlin discussions, recorded by Vladimir Malin, head of the Central Committee General Department, indicates that the new foreign policy began as the ad hoc effort of the collective leadership to correct the mistakes of Stalin's course. Later, however, it developed its own momentum and conceptual foundations. Andrei Alexandrov-Agentov, a veteran diplomat, recalled that Khrushchev, Mikoyan, and Malenkov were "the initiators of revision of Stalinist traditions in foreign policy and creation of an approach to new world problems that was innovative to a certain degree."[32]

According to Alexandrov-Agentov, a new approach "consisted of three main elements: to prop up to the maximum and tie to the Soviet Union the 'people's democracies' of Eastern and Central Europe; to create, wherever possible, a neutral buffer between the two opposing military political blocs; and to gradually establish economic and other more or less normal forms of peaceful cooperation with the NATO countries."[33] Khrushchev, as many Western leaders feared, aimed at undermining NATO and ultimately forcing the United States to withdraw from Europe. Later, in February 1960, at the Presidium, Khrushchev would admit that this was his "dearest dream."[34] In pursuit of the first objective of the "new foreign policy," the Kremlin created the Warsaw Treaty Organization in May 1955. Just as NATO provided legitimacy for the presence of American troops in Western Europe, the new organization gave the Soviet Union an additional reason to station Soviet troops in Eastern Europe.[35] As events in Hungary soon demonstrated, the new bloc was a useful framework for justifying Soviet military invasion of an "allied" country in order to "save" a Communist regime within its boundaries. The Soviets appeared to be acting not only in their own interests but also in the interests of the entire alliance. Most immediately, in the light of the forthcoming pullout of Soviet troops from Austria, the treaty validated the deployment of Soviet troops in Hungary and Rumania.

The concept of neutrality emerged from the Presidium discussions on the Austrian state treaty in March–April 1955, the first successful gamble in the Kremlin's new foreign policy.[36] Reconciliation with Yugoslavia, while pursuing the goal of returning this country to the Soviet camp, also had the immediate purpose of the "preventing of further expansion of the zone of NATO in Europe."[37] Specifically, this meant encouraging the neutral status of Sweden and Finland and ruining U.S. plans to create a so-called Balkan pact, involving Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey. From these specific cases, the Kremlin moved to the idea of promoting neutrality at large, offering Western Europe a substitute for U.S. protection and the idea of a pan-European system of security and cooperation.

The aims of the new foreign policy grew out of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm, but they were significantly more flexible than Stalin's policy. Aside from a new tolerance for neutrality, there was a new stake in economic cooperation and trade. Stalin was obsessed with keeping the Soviet Union closed to Western influences and preferred autarky and isolation to economic and trade ties with Western countries.[38] The collective leadership, above all Mikoyan, who was responsible for foreign trade, believed that Stalin had been mistaken. They returned to the idea drawn from the arsenal of Bolshevik diplomacy in the 1920s, when Soviet leaders had regarded trade deals with various capitalist countries as the way to both obtain vital investments and technologies and acquire the support of big business in improving political relations. Many in the Presidium expected that crowds of capitalists would stand in line at the doors of Soviet embassies in Washington, Paris, London, Bonn, and Tokyo.[39]

Other favorite tools of the new foreign policy were "public diplomacy" and the propaganda of disarmament. Public diplomacy involved authorized trips of Soviet artists, scientists, writers, musicians, and journalists to Western countries, with the aim of dispelling anti-Communist notions about the Soviet Union as a totalitarian society. When Khrushchev and other Soviet leaders began to go abroad, starting with the trip to Yugoslavia in May 1955, they traveled, in an apt phrase of David Caute, "like Renaissance princes, accompanied by a retinue of performers —ballerinas, singers, and pianists were taken along." The Presidium decided to invite world youth to a festival in Moscow, to see how friendly, peaceful, and open Soviet society was.[40] The collective leadership also went much further than Stalin's propagandist measures on disarmament and, in comparison with Stalin, expected much more from their new initiatives. In May 1955, to the surprise of many, the Soviet Union agreed to lower the levels of conventional forces in Europe and to establish a system of inspection at military checkpoints (railroads, airports, and so on) to reduce fears of a surprise conventional attack.[41] In the short term, these initiatives pushed the United States to revise its own position and

start negotiating with the Soviets. In the longer term, the Presidium set the far-reaching goal of changing the image of the Soviet threat in the West.

The transformation of Soviet foreign policy in 1955 was part of the de-Stalinization process. But it would be simplistic to portray its origins as simply the struggle between friends and foes of Stalin's legacy. Changes in foreign and domestic policies stemmed, above all, from the new external and domestic situation after Stalin's death.[42] On the eve of the Twentieth Party Congress, the Presidium sought to put all the elements of a new foreign policy together. Instead of Stalin's doctrine on the inevitability of war, the members decided to promote a new worldview in which the capitalist world would coexist with and peacefully compete against the Soviet Union and its allies. Their main thesis was that the new foreign policy would help persuade the Western "petty bourgeoisie" and other "vacillating elements" of the Soviet Union's peaceful intentions. Malenkov, a coauthor of this policy, spoke with satisfaction that "the system of peace forces has been strengthened." The head of the Party Control Committee, Nikolai Shvernik, summed it up: "During one year we did a great job. We persuaded the masses that we do not want war."[43]

Party elites and powerful bureaucracies applauded the new foreign policy. Still, the collective leadership could not count on their automatic support. As the July 1955 plenum showed, the issues of foreign policy once again became, just as in the political struggles of the 1920s, linked to the broader issues of ideological legitimacy. Khrushchev, Molotov, Malenkov, and other potentates had to explain and defend their foreign policy choices at meetings with the party elites.

The theme of a "great Russian state" retained a major appeal to ethnic Russians among the party and state functionaries. In contrast, the architects of the new foreign policy began to reemphasize the internationalist themes of "unity of working people" and "fraternal solidarity," popular in the days of Comintern and eclipsed during Stalin's reign. Khrushchev's beliefs, and also his temperament, had a lot to do with the weakening of Russo-centric chauvinism and the reintroduction of ideological romanticism into Soviet foreign policy. Unlike Stalin's mind, Khrushchev's mind was not pessimistic and evil; he was not obsessed with worst-case scenarios. Khrushchev believed that the Russian Revolution was about bringing happiness and equality to the working masses, not about recreating the Russo-centric empire under a new guise. Stalin evoked the images of Russian czars, great statesmen, and warriors as his peers. In contrast, Khrushchev often compared himself to the Jewish boy Pinya, from his favorite story, an underdog who escaped all pitfalls to become a leader.[44]

Khrushchev was not educated enough to be ideologically dogmatic, like Molotov. It is doubtful that he ever read Lenin's works on imperialism that had so

shaped the perceptions of his opponent. The arguments he used in foreign policy discussions lacked structure and logic: Khrushchev's speechwriters usually had to completely rewrite his speeches, removing earthy and erratic pronouncements. At the same time, Khrushchev was a genuine and passionate believer in the global victory of Communism. He expected that the combination of Soviet state power and revolutionary means would help to bury world capitalism. As a revolutionary romantic, he rejected Stalin's cautious Eurasian imperialism. For him the entire world was ripe for Communism.

Stalin's diplomacy cynically exploited the Communist faith and those who shared it for his goal of expanding his power and empire. Stalin paid lip service to "proletarian solidarity" and "Communist brotherhood." Khrushchev, by contrast, believed in social justice and a Communist paradise on earth, the solidarity of workers and peasants around the world, and the obligation of the USSR to support the struggle of colonized peoples for independence. He took seriously the moral and ideological capital the Soviet Union had gained in the struggle against Nazism. And he was dismayed by Stalin's naked imperialist policies since 1945, especially with regard to Turkey, Iran, and China. Although Khrushchev firmly believed that the Soviet Union was entitled to maintain a military presence in Central Europe, he felt that Stalin's crude pressure on Poland, Hungary, and other countries in the region had hurt the Communist cause there and compromised local Communist parties.[45]

Khrushchev offered simple solutions to complex foreign policy issues and expressed them in the language of the Bolshevized worker, the salt of the party, who rose to its highest position. This initially increased his appeal to many in the nomenklatura who were the children of peasants and workers and became *khoziaistvenniki* (economic managers) in the enormous state apparatus. These simple solutions, however, would create many problems for the Soviet Union, when the new and bombastic leader appeared on the international stage. When this happened, Khrushchev would find it increasingly difficult to sell his global and romantic version of the revolutionary-imperial paradigm to the skeptical and cautious party and state elites.

THE GENEVA TEST

Khrushchev had always returned to Eisenhower's speech of April 1953 in which the U.S. president addressed Stalin's successors with an appeal to part with Stalin's ways. The Presidium portrayed the speech as an ultimatum, but Khrushchev remembered "four conditions" set forth by President Eisenhower—truce in Korea, settlement on Austria, return of German and Japanese POWs from

Soviet camps, and steps to curb the arms race.[46] By the summer of 1955, from the viewpoint of the Soviet leadership, they had met Eisenhower's terms in Korea and Austria and had introduced much more far-reaching disarmament initiatives than had Washington.

Significantly, the settlement of the German Question was not among the American conditions. The Western powers did not expect any agreement on German reunification; they moved, however, to exploit the theme of German reunification more effectively. Since early 1954, the British had advanced the Eden Plan. Its essence was that free elections should determine the government in the unified Germany.[47] The Kremlin politicians rejected the Eden Plan, although this hurt their propaganda purposes in Germany and NATO countries. Since Beria's arrest, the idea of German reunification, especially according to Western blueprints, had become unthinkable in Moscow. The Soviet leaders, briefed by intelligence analysts, knew that the U.S. administration was not ready for serious negotiations.[48] They hoped, however, to split NATO ranks, by reaching out to Great Britain and France. The French government in particular, distracted by the colonial war in Algeria, became seriously interested in improving relations with the Soviet Union.[49]

The major goal of Khrushchev and his comrades at the summit in Geneva was to find out if the Eisenhower administration had on its mind a war against the Soviet Union. For Presidium members, the surprise Nazi attack on June 22, 1941, was the largest trauma of their lives. They could not afford again to misread the enemy's intentions. Another goal was to demonstrate to the U.S. leadership that they would not be intimidated by nuclear blackmail and other kinds of pressure. At Khrushchev's suggestion, Marshal Georgy Zhukov joined the delegation on the assumption that he and Eisenhower, the two military leaders who liked and respected each other (Eisenhower even invited Zhukov to the United States in 1945, but Stalin said no), would be able to have a frank talk. In Geneva, Khrushchev and Zhukov did their best to make one major point to Eisenhower: Western views of the failure of the post-Stalin leadership were false; the new leadership sat firmly in the saddle and had more unity and support than ever before.[50]

The Eisenhower administration had conflicting priorities. As historian Richard Immerman concludes, John Foster Dulles's "agenda for the summit was not to settle outstanding problems of war and peace, but to lay the foundation for future progress toward the retraction or rollback of Soviet power." The secretary of state explained his big idea, which was "to get the Russians out of the satellite states. . . . Now for the first time this is in the realm of possibility." Eisenhower, as new evidence reveals, held a different priority: to attempt to control nuclear armaments.[51] The Eisenhower administration faced the need to reconsider its

long-term policy of resistance to any top-level contacts with any Communist leaders. As John Foster Dulles noted ruefully after the Geneva summit, "We never wanted to go to Geneva, but the pressure of people of the world forced us to do so."[52]

The Kremlin delegation arrived in Geneva in July 1955 in a state of excitement and uneasiness. Khrushchev and his comrades were in fear of being "ambushed" by unexpected Western initiatives. According to Georgy Kornienko, a veteran of the Committee of Information, an analytical division at the Foreign Ministry, a group of the committee experts flew to Geneva with the Soviet delegation and throughout the meeting worked closely with all branches of Soviet intelligence services, supplying the Soviet delegation with fresh intercepts of communications from the other side and helping in their interpretation.[53]

Still, a dramatic unveiling of Eisenhower's "Open Skies," a proposal to allow plane reconnaissance overflights to reduce mutual fear of nuclear war, took the Soviet delegation by surprise. President Eisenhower, concerned with the runaway dynamics of the nuclear arms race, regarded this proposal as a chance "to open a tiny gate in the disarmament fence." In 1955, however, neither the American nor the Soviet leadership was ready to implement this idea. Bulganin, as the Americans noted, reacted with interest, but Khrushchev quickly dismissed Open Skies as a "blatant espionage ploy."[54]

The troika of Khrushchev, Bulganin, and Zhukov left the conference without any agreements, yet with big sighs of relief. They came away with the conviction that they could manage relations with capitalist great powers as well as Stalin had, perhaps even better. Western leaders at the summit did not manage to intimidate or disorient them. It was also key that Eisenhower talked to them without condescension, almost as if they were equal partners. American sources prove the correctness of the latter assessment.[55] Khrushchev concluded that Eisenhower was a relaxed, benign, and not particularly impressive fellow who delegated foreign affairs to his secretary of state, John Foster Dulles. Other Soviet observers shared this perception.[56] The Eisenhower-Zhukov informal talks confirmed the Soviet leaders' impression that the U.S. president was afraid of nuclear war.[57]

The "spirit of Geneva" after the summit brought hopes for European détente. But the commitment of the Kremlin oligarchy to the revolutionary-imperial paradigm provided no basis for agreement between the USSR and the United States. While demonstrating to the world their readiness for the confidence-building measures to promote disarmament, the Kremlin and the military top brass never intended to carry out these promises. Before advancing these disarmament initiatives, the Presidium confidentially informed the Chinese Communist leadership that there was no danger that Western controllers would inundate the Soviet

secret installations, because the "Anglo-American bloc will not agree to eliminate atomic weapons and to ban the production of these weapons." By November 1955, the "spirit of Geneva" was already fading. Molotov, still Soviet foreign minister, rejected any proposals to broaden Soviet contacts with the outside world as "interference in internal affairs."[58]

The failure of the Geneva summit to reach agreement on German unity meant that the division of Germany would remain a source of instability and insecurity in Europe. Even before the summit, West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer, reacting to public pressure after West Germany joined NATO and the Austrian State Treaty was signed, proposed coming to Moscow after the Geneva talks for separate negotiations. In September 1955, Adenauer, along with a large delegation, came to Moscow and conducted strenuous and emotional talks with the Kremlin leadership. The talks resulted in the establishment of West German–Soviet diplomatic relations and the release of the last German POWs. Immediately afterward, the Soviet leadership invited the GDR's prime minister, Otto Grotewohl, to Moscow to sign a bilateral treaty that boosted even further the sovereignty of the East German regime.[59]

This looked like a smart diplomatic move. But the Soviet leadership was driving itself into a corner from which it could not emerge without losing face. Soviet insistence on permanent division of Germany gave Ulbricht, who was emerging as an unchallenged leader of the GDR, an ever-greater leverage on Soviet policy.[60] Also, the Kremlin put itself in danger of appearing as an opponent of German reunification. Understanding this danger, Molotov proposed in November 1955 that the Soviet line on German talks should accept the basics of the Eden Plan. In return for Soviet agreement to hold universal and free elections in all of Germany, Molotov told the Presidium that the Western powers would have to repeal West Germany's membership in NATO and establish the All-German Council for implementation of reunification. They would also have to agree, together with the Soviet Union, to withdraw all foreign troops from both German states within three months. Molotov argued that the Western powers would never agree to such a proposal, because it involved a great challenge to NATO's unity. At the same time, he argued, this would restore Soviet face among Germans.[61]

Molotov's argument made sense, but Khrushchev killed his proposal. In Khrushchev's opinion, the Eisenhower administration might call the Soviet bluff and "could agree to withdrawal of troops." Also, the Western powers could interpret the shift of the Soviet position as a victory for their "position of strength." And, most important, the GDR Communists would say: "You are betraying us." Khrushchev, supported by the rest of the Presidium, confidently predicted that the Soviets could achieve two goals simultaneously: preservation of the socialist East

Germany and the destabilization of NATO. This episode demonstrated once again that the GDR, once an instrument of Soviet goals in Europe, had become a major Soviet asset and not available for bargaining.[62]

The summit in Geneva, Khrushchev recalled later, "convinced us once again that there was not any sort of prewar situation in existence at that time, and our enemies were afraid of us in the same way as we were afraid of them." The Kremlin rulers concluded that Soviet diplomacy had shaken the American leadership out of its comfortable position of superiority and forced the Americans to come to the negotiating table. This conclusion emboldened Khrushchev and his colleagues, contrary to their initial desires to pursue a cautious defensive course and to take the offensive outside the major theaters of the Cold War. By the fall of 1955, this would result in a major Soviet gamble in the Arab Middle East.

SUPPORTING RADICAL ALLIES

Stalin had failed to formulate any coherent policy in the Middle East. In January 1953, at the peak of the "Kremlin doctors' affair," Stalin broke diplomatic relations with Israel; at that time, he probably planned to use the bogus issue of a "Zionist conspiracy" as a pretext for a gigantic purge.[63] From 1949 to 1954, the official Soviet position was that the Arab countries of the Middle East, as well as Turkey and Iran, were ruled by reactionary regimes and were the pawns in the British-American struggle for the Middle East. Some Soviet experts and diplomats wanted the Kremlin to support Arab opposition to American attempts to create an anti-Soviet bloc in the region but did not dare to speak against the official line. After Stalin's death, the official estimation of the Arab nationalist regimes did not change; diplomatic correspondence and secret memoranda for the Presidium called Egypt's leader, General Muhammad Naguib, and his successor, General Gamal Abdel Nasser, "enemies," and even "fascists," despite their nonaligned positions in the Cold War. According to the Committee of Information's analysis in March 1954, Nasser used the threat of possible rapprochement with the Soviet Union as a means to blackmail the British into concessions on the control of the Suez Canal.[64] Similar views led Moscow to rebuff the approaches from the prime minister of Iran, Mohammad Mossadeq, in 1952 and 1953, which probably cost the Soviet Union a chance of improving relations with that country.[65]

The struggle against Molotov and the search for spectacular achievements led Khrushchev and his supporters to rediscover the potential of Arab nationalism in the Middle East. In July 1955, immediately after the devastating criticism of Molotov at the Party Plenum, the Presidium sent Khrushchev's new favorite

Central Committee secretary, Dmitry Shepilov, on a reconnaissance mission to the Middle East. Shepilov met Nasser and invited him to Moscow; he also began to establish friendly relations with leaders of other Arab states who refused to join the Western blocs. Shepilov came back to Moscow from the Middle East convinced that the region had great potential for another "peace offensive" against the Western powers. Andrei Sakharov and other nuclear designers happened to be invited to the Presidium on the day that it discussed Shepilov's report. An official explained that the leaders were discussing a decisive change of principles of Soviet policy on the Middle East: "From now on we will support the Arab nationalists. The longer-term target is the destruction of the established relations of the Arabs with Europe and the United States, creation of the 'oil crisis'—this will generate problems for Europe and will make it more dependent on us."[66] In the midst of the strategic stalemate in Europe and the Far East, this region provided a new outlet for the Kremlin's renewed optimism and ideological romanticism.

The consequences of this policy turn were immediate. The languishing Egyptian-Czechoslovak talks on the sale of arms rapidly came to a successful conclusion, and a flood of Soviet-designed Czechoslovak weaponry streamed into Egypt and Syria. Moscow supplied Egypt with half a million tons of oil and agreed to provide atomic energy technology. To no avail, concerned Western and Israeli officials tried to remonstrate against new Soviet policies publicly and privately.[67] The struggle between Moscow and the West for the Arab Middle East was beginning: in the next two decades, it would generate an unprecedented arms race in the region and produce three wars. In the immediate future, Moscow would be triumphant and destroy Western plans of containment on the southern flank of the Soviet Union. At the same time, as in the case of the GDR, heavy Soviet investment in its Arab clients would turn Egypt and Syria into major assets, similar to East Germany, that the Kremlin could not afford to lose. The Middle Eastern venture began as a geopolitical gamble, but it ended as a contributing factor to the Soviet imperial overstretch of the 1970s.

As the Soviets were making a breakthrough in the Middle East, they were seeking to strengthen their alliance with China. Sino-Soviet relations remained a crucial aspect of Soviet foreign policy. The Sino-Soviet Alliance of February 1950 made Soviet foreign policy resemble that of Imperial Russia's eagle, looking both westward and eastward. After Stalin's death, the Kremlin no longer could or wanted to treat Chinese leaders as junior partners. The Presidium leaders competed among themselves in reaching out to Beijing. Their first success was to procure an invitation for a People's Republic of China (PRC) delegation to the

Geneva conference on Indochina in May–July 1954. At the conference, Zhou Enlai shared the table with representatives of the United States, France, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Molotov treated the Chinese with pointed respect; he and other Soviet leaders considered it a major aim of Kremlin diplomacy to return China to the club of great powers.[68] In September and October 1954, Khrushchev became the first leader of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) to travel to the PRC. It was a mutually advantageous encounter: Khrushchev acquired the ammunition to wrest the mantle of statesman from Malenkov and Molotov; the Chinese leaders obtained much-needed political and economic support from Moscow at a time when Beijing was coming into confrontation with Taiwan's Nationalists over the offshore islands.[69]

Khrushchev believed that he did everything necessary to put the Sino-Soviet relations on a steady course. He finally fulfilled Stalin's promise to return all Soviet assets in Manchuria to China (that is, joint companies, the Soviet base in Port Arthur, and the railroad). He rejected bureaucratic objections to the generous terms of Soviet assistance to the PRC. Historian Odd Arne Westad called Soviet assistance to China in 1954–59 the "Soviet Union's Marshall Plan." The assistance equaled 7 percent of Soviet national income for that period. Thousands of Soviet experts worked in China, helping the Chinese to modernize their industry, create a basis for modern science and technology, and build educational and health systems. By August 1956, the Soviets were sending to China most of the new industrial equipment they were producing, at the expense of their own economic plans. A romantic view of Sino-Soviet relations as being "truly fraternal" and based on common, rather than national, interests spread among Soviet elites. The Presidium even decided to help the Chinese create their own atomic program. Subsequently, Soviet nuclear labs received instructions to help the Chinese build a uranium bomb and even provide them with a functional prototype.[70]

The Kremlin reacted with uneasiness to Beijing's intentions to "liberate" Taiwan during the Taiwan crisis (August 1954–April 1955). The Kremlin potentates had learned the lessons of the Korean War. Another war in the Far East would have derailed Soviet plans in Europe and, more ominously, drawn the Soviet Union into a conflict with the United States at a time when American strategic nuclear forces could reach and destroy any target in the Soviet Union—and Soviet forces still had nothing with which to retaliate.[71] Nevertheless, the desire to strengthen the Sino-Soviet Alliance was so strong in the Kremlin that Soviet leaders offered political, economic, and military support to the PRC during the Taiwan crisis. At the Geneva summit, the Soviet delegation appealed to Eisenhower to move toward a peace settlement with the PRC.[72]

On the surface, Sino-Soviet relations flourished. Underneath, however, they already contained the seeds of an eventual split. The Chinese supported the idea of the Warsaw Pact but were meaningfully silent on other elements of Soviet diplomacy, especially the reconciliation with Tito.[73] In the eyes of the Chinese leadership, the Kremlin still played the role of the senior partner, and they wanted "equal relations." Historian Chen Jian believes that Beijing's pursuit of an elusive "equality" in reality reflected a Chinese mentality of superiority.[74] It meant that whatever the new Soviet leadership did, nothing could satisfy the Chinese allies. Mao Ze-dong, in particular, was inclined to challenge Soviet supremacy in the Communist world and to advocate confronting "American imperialism" as the truly revolutionary alternative to détente diplomacy.[75] At the same time, at the end of April 1955, Zhou Enlai took part in the Bandung conference of Asian countries in Indonesia, at which the PRC reaffirmed its allegiance to the declaration on *Pancha Shila*, the five principles of peaceful coexistence borrowed from Buddhist moral code (India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, began to refer to them in 1952, and they became the basis of the Indian-Chinese talks in June 1954). In retrospect, the new Chinese policy was a rival's response to the new Soviet foreign policy.

THE YEAR OF CRISES

Khrushchev's attack on Stalin in a secret speech at the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU on February 25, 1956, opened the last and most dramatic stage of the succession struggle. New archival access has allowed historians to study the internal politics surrounding this extraordinary event.[76] Egged on by the first secretary, the Presidium commission for rehabilitation of Stalin's victims prepared the memoranda on Stalin's repressions. The facts collected by the commission contained in the archives give a graphic picture of the murder of the Bolshevik Old Guard on Stalin's orders; no wonder that even determined Stalinists in the Presidium and the Secretariat were shocked to the core, including Pyotr Pospelov, the head of the commission.[77] Still, Molotov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov spoke against presenting these findings to the Congress. Khrushchev disarmed his opponents by threatening to appeal to the Congress delegates. And he resorted to the device that had helped him in the past against Malenkov and Molotov: he convened the plenum and obtained from the unsuspecting delegates a formal authorization for the special report on Stalin.[78] The commission memorandum did not satisfy Khrushchev, and as the Congress was already in progress, he continued to work on his Stalin speech. When Khrushchev finally read the speech, he improvised; and his improvisations, according to the accounts of

witnesses, were more emotional and categorical than the prepared text. Khrushchev could not abide half-measures: once he decided to destroy Stalin's cult, he began to hack it to pieces. When he saw resistance, he bulldozed it.[79]

For a while, it seemed that the politics of de-Stalinization and the new foreign policy reinforced each other. A good example is the rapid rise of Dmitry Shepilov, who in June 1956 replaced Molotov as foreign minister. Shepilov quickly rose from the position of editor of *Pravda* to the post of Central Committee secretary. He helped Khrushchev to edit his secret speech. Shepilov had what Khrushchev lacked: education, erudition, a good pen, and knowledge of Marxist literature. The first secretary expected him to represent abroad the new face of Soviet diplomacy in the spirit of dialogue, compromise, and a relaxation of tensions.

Until that moment, the struggle between Khrushchev and Molotov complicated the day-to-day functions of Soviet foreign policy. Even after the July 1955 plenum, Foreign Ministry officials remained caught between the hammer of Molotov and the anvil of Khrushchev. Their ideas and proposals served as the weapons in the clash between the foreign minister and the first secretary, and as a result these proposals ended up being sacrificed, mutilated, and delayed.[80] This disastrous mingling of politics and personal rivalry with the process of foreign policy decision making seemed to have disappeared after Molotov's removal. According to Shepilov's own recollection, Khrushchev treated him with respect and afforded him complete trust.[81]

Shepilov's arrival at the Foreign Ministry made Soviet foreign policy more responsive to the advice of experts and created a chance to reform the ministry's ossified structure. Stalin and Molotov had cut off the diplomatic bureaucracy from the real business of foreign policy making. Diplomats and Foreign Ministry officials lived in fear of "contamination" from suspicious contacts with foreigners. Soviet journalists and writers who visited the Soviet UN Mission in New York in 1955 reported that Soviet diplomats reminded them of "hermit crabs": they avoided any contacts with the representatives of the country on which they were supposed to report. Shepilov, adept at a more interactive, democratic style of leadership, encouraged change.[82]

But the change was short-lived. Khrushchev did not want a strong, independent-minded foreign minister. This became clear during the Middle Eastern crisis provoked by the decision of Egypt's leader, Nasser, to nationalize the Suez Canal. In early August 1956, the Presidium sent Shepilov to an international conference in London to discuss this issue. Initially, Khrushchev advocated caution in a speech at the Presidium. Instead of an aggressive, tough stand against Great Britain and France, the owners of the canal, the first secretary advocated a "soft, objective and deeply analytical" approach. Supported by Zhukov, Malenkov,

Bulganin, and others, Khrushchev suggested that the Soviet Union should assure the Western powers about its intentions: there were no plans "to swallow Egypt and to capture the Suez canal." The Soviet Union, Khrushchev suggested, should indicate its interest "only in the unimpeded movement of ships [in the canal]."[83]

At the conference, Shepilov carried out the moderate instructions and did much to promote a joint U.S.-Soviet mediation in the crisis and avoid excessive friction between the Soviet Union, on the one hand, and Britain and France on the other. This, however, became more difficult later, when the Western powers rejected Soviet initiatives. Khrushchev spontaneously shifted from moderation to a hard line. The first secretary must have been tempted by the chance to teach London and Paris a bitter lesson and demonstrate his solidarity with Nasser.[84] Shepilov ignored Presidium instructions to denounce the Western countries for "blatant pillage and high-way robbery." Khrushchev was outraged by his protégé's show of independence. Speaking at the Presidium on August 27, 1956, Khrushchev characterized Shepilov's initiative as "dangerous."[85] When war broke out between Egypt and Great Britain, France, and Israel in late October, Khrushchev's pugnacity and ideological temptations would prevail over moderation. He would use nuclear brinkmanship for the first time to dramatize a Soviet political presence in the Middle East.[86]

Beginning in late summer 1956, Poland had become a hotbed of unrest in the Soviet bloc. The collective leadership, despite the recent reconciliation with Tito's Yugoslavia, viewed the slogan, "Polish road to socialism," as the beginning of the end for the Warsaw Pact. In their internal discussions, the Presidium members used the same language as *Pravda* used: "The [Western] imperialists" seek "to separate us," using the language of national roads, "and defeat one by one." With the aim of propping up the loyal Polish Communists, the Presidium agreed to remove Soviet KGB advisers from Polish security organs and provide economic assistance to the Polish state.[87] But the experience in the GDR in 1953 was fresh on its mind.

The Kremlin's concern turned into panic on October 19, 1956, when it learned that the Polish Communists were convening a plenum, without any consultation with Moscow, to replace Edward Ochab as their leader with Wladyslaw Gomulka, who had been expelled from the Polish United Workers Party (PUWP) (the Communist Party of Poland) and imprisoned from 1951 to 1954 for "nationalist deviations." At the same time, the Polish leadership demanded that Soviet advisers in the Polish army also leave, as well as Marshal Konstantin Rokossovsky, a Soviet citizen of Polish descent who had been appointed by Stalin as Poland's minister of defense. Khrushchev and other Kremlin potentates immediately flew to War-

saw and attempted to bully Gomulka and his Polish colleagues with tough words and raw power, using the presence of Soviet troops on Polish soil. The Kremlin delegation returned home on October 20 in an agitated mood. On that day, the Presidium concluded that "the remaining solution is to terminate what is going on in Poland." The notes of Vladimir Malin at this point become especially cryptic, but it is probable that the Kremlin rulers decided to take preliminary steps to use Soviet troops and replace the Polish leadership. After Rokossovsky was removed from the PUWP Politburo, however, the collective leadership temporized. Suddenly, Khrushchev suggested "tolerance" and admitted that "military intervention, under the circumstances, must be cancelled." The Presidium unanimously agreed.[88]

The main reason for this surprising change must have been Gomulka's speech at the plenum after the Kremlin delegation left Poland. He pledged to build "socialism" and fulfill obligations to the Warsaw Treaty Organization. Another factor in the Kremlin's change of heart was the reaction of the Chinese. The Poles appealed to other Communist Party leaders, above all to the Chinese leaders, begging them to intercede and prevent an impending Soviet invasion. Later, after the fact, Mao Ze-dong asserted that "the CCP categorically rejected the Soviet proposal [for intervention] and attempted to put forward the Chinese position directly by immediately sending a delegation to Moscow with Liu Shaoqi at its head." At an urgent meeting of the CCP Politburo, Mao Ze-dong blamed the crisis in Poland on the tendency toward "big-power chauvinism" in Moscow. Immediately after the meeting, he asked Soviet ambassador Pavel Yudin to convey China's opposition to military intervention to Khrushchev.[89]

On October 23, Budapest and the rest of Hungary rose up against the Communist regime. In view of the apparent danger, the collective leadership closed its ranks and acted by consensus. Still, the old political and personal rifts were not completely gone. Advocates of de-Stalinization and the new foreign policy had good reasons to oppose direct Soviet military intervention in Hungary because it undermined Soviet efforts to sell its new peaceful image to the West beginning in 1955. Molotov, Kaganovich, and Voroshilov clearly blamed these policies and Khrushchev personally for what was happening. Since the Presidium continued to act by consensus, the rifts within it could not lead to open splits. Khrushchev's supporters and even Khrushchev himself shifted their positions depending on the direction and framework of the debates. Like the discussions on the German Question in the spring and summer of 1953, the decision-making process on Hungary was in turmoil, reflecting the complexity of the situation as well as the personal and political calculations of the Kremlin politicians. On October 26,

both supporters and secret enemies of Khrushchev in the Presidium approved the introduction of Soviet troops into Budapest. On October 30, the Presidium, however, switched to the policy of negotiations and authorized a declaration on new principles guiding Soviet relations "with other socialist countries."[90]

Foreign observers had long considered this declaration a perfidious trick on the part of Moscow, but historians have recently learned that this declaration resulted from the complex debates at the Presidium that ended with the decision to forgo the use of military force in Hungary. The failure of the first indecisive use of Soviet troops to extinguish the uprising in Budapest and the number of casualties tipped the scales. From Budapest, Mikoyan, the Presidium special emissary, defended the policy of negotiations and compromise with consistency and courage. Mikhail Suslov, another emissary, was obliged to do the same. Zhukov and Malenkov supported the withdrawal of troops.[91]

An unexpected factor in the Presidium discussion was pressure from a Chinese delegation headed by Liu Shaoqi. The Chinese had come to Moscow on October 23 to discuss the Polish question. Instead, the Chinese became kibitzers on the Kremlin's discussions about the Hungarian revolution. At first, Mao Zedong, ignoring the realities in the streets of Budapest, instructed the delegation in Moscow to oppose Soviet interference in Hungarian, as well as Polish, affairs. Amazingly, the Chinese suggested that the Soviet leadership should subscribe to the Bandung conference's principles of "peaceful coexistence" concerning relationships among Warsaw Pact countries. Apparently, Mao felt it was the opportune moment to teach the Soviets a lesson about their imperialist arrogance and enhance the CCP's central role in the Communist movement by mediating between the Soviets and their Eastern European satellites. Swayed by arguments from his own supporters and the arguments of the Chinese Communists, Khrushchev proposed the policy of negotiations and the declaration based on the Chinese proposal.[92]

The proposal to leave Hungary alone split the Presidium. Bulganin, Molotov, Voroshilov, and Kaganovich defended the Soviet right to interfere in the affairs of "fraternal parties." This, of course, meant that Soviet military force could be used to restore Communist regimes. Then Foreign Minister Shepilov delivered an eloquent speech in favor of withdrawal. He said that the course of events revealed "the crisis in our relations with the countries of people's democracy. Anti-Soviet elements are widespread" in Central Europe, and, therefore, the declaration should be only the first step toward "elimination of the elements of diktat" between the Soviet Union and other members of the Warsaw Pact. Zhukov, Ekaterina Furtseva, and Matvei Saburov spoke one after another in favor of withdrawal.[93]

The noninterventionist momentum was reversed on the following day, October 31, when the Presidium voted with the same unanimity to order Marshal Ivan Konev to prepare for decisive military intervention in Hungary. Matvei Saburov reminded the Presidium that the day before they had agreed that military intervention in Hungary would "vindicate NATO." Molotov dryly countered that "yesterday's decision was only a compromise," and the rest of the Presidium members spoke unanimously, overturning what they had said only twenty-four hours earlier.[94]

Some scholars have attributed this startling flip-flop to external events, above all, the reports of the gruesome lynching of Communists in Hungary, Gomulka's fears that the collapse of Communism in Hungary would cause Poland to be next, and the Franco-British-Israeli aggression against Egypt. There was also a large "spillover" effect inside the Soviet Union itself: unrest in the Baltics and Western Ukraine and student hunger strikes and demonstrations in Moscow, Leningrad, and other cities. Trust in the leadership had fallen among intellectuals and other social groups.[95] All these developments and factors, however, had existed on the previous day. The Franco-British declaration of war in Egypt was hardly a cause for Khrushchev's shift. On October 28, for example, the Soviet leader said about the Suez crisis: "The English and French are stirring up trouble in Egypt. We should not get caught in the same company." In other words, he did not want for the Soviet Union to be seen as an aggressive power, preparing an invasion of another country. On October 31, however, Khrushchev gave a different twist to the same situation: "If we depart from Hungary, it will give a great boost to the Americans, English, and French—the imperialists. To Egypt they will then add Hungary."[96] The decisive news that tipped the scales was the declaration by the Hungarian leader Imre Nagy that his government had decided to remove Hungary from the Warsaw Pact.

Khrushchev was in a terrible bind. He did not want to undermine his own foreign policy and the new image of the Soviet Union. At the same time, he had long feared that the Soviet Union might retreat from Central Europe and that then his rivals in the collective leadership might gain the upper hand. He was probably correct, since the majority of the party apparatus and the upper echelons of the military believed that the radical de-Stalinization was Khrushchev's great political error.[97] On October 31, Khrushchev stole the thunder from his hard-line critics who would have been at his throat had he "lost" Hungary. At the same time, reacting to Molotov's criticism of his unilateralist actions, Khrushchev decided that military intervention could take place only if the leaders of the other "people's democracies," the Chinese Communists and Tito's Yugoslavia, gave

their consent to it. After a few days of trips and consultations, the military option received unanimous support. On the morning of November 4, 1956, Marshal Konev's armies invaded Hungary.[98]

Mikoyan wrote in his memoirs that the Soviet intervention in Hungary "buried" the hopes for détente. Inside the Soviet Union, the process of liberalization was replaced by a wave of arrests and expulsions of students, workers, and intellectuals. The first secretary came out of the crisis looking almost like a lame duck. During the Presidium discussions on Hungary in early November, Khrushchev was unusually silent. When he attempted, as he often did, to pick on Molotov, the latter dressed him down: "You should stop bossing us."[99] The Chinese leadership also began to speak to the Soviets with much greater authority than before. According to the Chinese version of events, the intervention of the PRC saved Poland from Soviet invasion but then gave resolve to a vacillating Khrushchev in his determination to restore "socialism" in Hungary.[100] After the Soviet invasion of Hungary, Zhou Enlai made a tour of Central Europe and then came to Moscow on January 18, 1957. Zhou lectured Khrushchev on three mistakes: the lack of an all-round analysis, the lack of self-criticism, and the lack of consultation with the fraternal countries. He left with the opinion that the Kremlin leadership was lacking in sophistication and political maturity.[101]

Khrushchev, from his position of weakness, needed Mao's friendship and tolerated the new Chinese role. At the meeting with Zhou Enlai, he caved in to Chinese criticism. At a reception in the Chinese embassy, he invited all Communists "to learn from Stalin how to fight." Later Molotov recalled with sarcasm: "When comrade Zhou Enlai came, we began to rhapsodize that everyone should be such a Communist as Stalin was; but when Zhou Enlai left, we stopped saying it."[102]

Molotov, who believed that "Titoists" would never be reliable friends and allies, must have had a bittersweet feeling when Soviet-Yugoslav relations soured again after the rapprochement of 1955. Although Tito supported the Soviet decision to intervene in Hungary and the removal of the Hungarian leader Imre Nagy from political life, he felt embarrassed, when—almost by accident—Nagy and his comrades ended up hiding in the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest. Tito, valuing Yugoslavia's independent international reputation, refused to hand over Nagy to the Soviets. A shrill altercation between Tito and the Kremlin leaders ensued. Then, in his speech at Pula on November 11, 1956, Tito spoke about "systemic causes" of Stalinism, blaming the Hungarian tragedy in part on the conservative forces in the CPSU. He also said that Communist parties could now be categorized as either Stalinist or non-Stalinist. This speech enraged Khrushchev,

who would refer to it for years as "treasonous and despicable." The Presidium voted to allow the public ideological polemics with Tito to appear in the pages of *Pravda*. The situation did not improve, when the KGB managed to lure Nagy and his associates out of the Yugoslav embassy, arrest them, and place them under custody in Rumania. Later, the Rumanians transferred them to the Hungarian quisling government of Janos Kadar. Nagy and some of his associates were executed after a secret trial, with the approval of the Kremlin and European Communist leaders. Privately, Tito must have breathed a sigh of relief. In public, however, the Yugoslav government protested the execution.[103]

Khrushchev's flip-flops undermined his authority as a statesman among Stalinists and anti-Stalinists alike. There was a stream of letters from party members to the Central Committee full of dismay and even contempt for Khrushchev's leadership. Some demanded rehabilitating Stalin as a great statesman and warned that the enemy would catch the Soviet Union "demobilized" and relaxed if Khrushchev continued to get his way. Others wondered if there were "two Khrushchevs" in the party's Central Committee: one denounced Stalin and the other urged the Soviet people to learn from him.[104]

DEMISE OF THE COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

Khrushchev's weakness encouraged his rivals in the Presidium to join forces against him. In June 1957, Molotov and Kaganovich decided this was a good moment to oust Khrushchev and ambushed him at a meeting of the Presidium. Khrushchev was one of the few people who did not see the danger to his authority. "He created enemies as if on purpose," reflected Mikoyan later, "but did not realize it himself." Malenkov, Bulganin, Voroshilov, Saburov, and Pervukhin, former allies of Khrushchev whom he also managed to alienate, joined the plot against him. Even Dmitry Shepilov decided that Khrushchev had to go.[105]

But a lack of political unity among the plotters was a problem: Molotov and Shepilov criticized Khrushchev from very different angles and for different reasons. The plotters also forgot that Khrushchev had all the muscle of state power in his hands. Most members of the Secretariat, all Khrushchev protégés, supported him against the Presidium potentates. The defense minister, Marshal Zhukov, and the chairman of the KGB, Ivan Serov, proved to be crucial allies throughout the crisis. With the help of the Secretariat members, Zhukov, and Serov, Khrushchev convened an emergency Central Committee plenum that restored his supremacy and denounced the plotters as an "anti-party group." The materials of the June 1957 plenum, although obviously slanted in favor of the

victorious Khrushchev and against the "anti-party group" of his opponents, offer remarkable insight into the intertwining nature of Soviet politics and foreign policy.[106]

The opposition blamed Khrushchev for destroying the collective leadership and creating a new monopoly on decision making in foreign policy and on other issues. Molotov denounced Khrushchev's new doctrine that an agreement between the two nuclear powers, the Soviet Union and the United States, could be a solid foundation for an international détente. He stated his belief that, as long as imperialism existed, another world war could only be postponed but not prevented. Molotov also claimed that Khrushchev's doctrine ignored the role of "all other socialist countries, besides the USSR," especially the PRC. In addition to these doctrinal matters, Molotov felt revulsion at the homespun, uncouth, and casual style of Khrushchev and his personalized diplomacy.[107]

Mikoyan provided the strongest counter to the opposition. He recalled the recent series of crises in Poland, Hungary, and Suez and concluded that both the unity of Soviet leadership and Khrushchev's bold initiatives had contributed to their successful resolutions. Mikoyan also blamed Molotov, Malenkov, and Kaganovich for a narrow, purely budgetary, approach to trade and economic relations with the Communist countries of Central Europe, as well as with neutral Austria and Finland. Khrushchev, he said, on the contrary, regarded subsidies to these countries as a vital necessity, dictated by Soviet security interests. "We believe we must create an economic base for our influence on Austria, to strengthen its neutral status, so that West Germany would not be [the economic and trade] monopolist in Austria." And as to the Soviet bloc, "If we leave East Germany and Czechoslovakia without [purchase] orders, then the entire socialist camp will begin to collapse."[108]

Many plenum delegates sympathized with Molotov's conservative views more than with Khrushchev's crisis-mongering and subsidies. The party and state elites were not pro-détente—many of them were more hard-line, militaristic, and rigid than the "enlightened" majority in the Presidium. While rejecting Molotov's dogmatism and denouncing Stalin's foreign policy errors, the majority at the plenums used strong ideological language in their discussions of international affairs and military security. Yet it was not foreign policy that determined their stance. Rather, some of the delegates feared that, if Molotov and Kaganovich won, "blood would flow again." Also, the removal of the old oligarchic group meant promotion for Khrushchev's appointees. One of the speakers complained that Molotov "still considers us as wearing short pants."[109] Leonid Brezhnev was in the group that replaced the purged oligarchs in the political leadership. As the future showed, the new Presidium after 1957 was full of mediocrity that was

inferior to the old oligarchy in energy, talents, knowledge, and horizons.[110] They had, however, one advantage from Khrushchev's viewpoint: he believed they were completely dependent on him.

In October, Khrushchev crowned his ascendancy by firing his greatest ally, but also at times critic and independent figure, Defense Minister Marshal Georgy Zhukov. As before, he convened a special plenum on October 28–29, 1957, to legitimize his action. The plenum transcript does not shed much light on the murky details of this affair but does indicate that there were some reasons (at least in the immediate post-Stalinist atmosphere of power struggles) for Khrushchev to suspect that Zhukov, together with GRU head Sergei Shtemenko, had plotted against him. But it is even more likely that Khrushchev heard from the KGB what he wanted to hear about Zhukov. Shortly before this happened, Zhukov, together with Andrei Gromyko, proposed to the Presidium that Moscow should accept the American Open Skies idea. He was convinced that the United States would back down, giving Soviet propaganda extra points. Khrushchev was skeptical, and at the October plenum he used this episode to criticize Zhukov both for his softness on Eisenhower's idea and for warmongering, claiming that Zhukov wanted to use the aerial reconnaissance to prepare for the first strike.[111] It was not the last time that political infighting in the Kremlin killed a potentially promising diplomatic opening.

These trumped-up charges aside, the plenum discussions give some valuable insights into the thinking and discussions at the highest level of the Soviet political-military leadership. Khrushchev sought to demonstrate to the delegates, especially to the military, that he, not Zhukov, knew better how to combine diplomatic peace offensives with the growth of military strength.[112] Whatever doubts the Soviet military had at the time about the whole affair, it unanimously supported the party leader and denounced Zhukov.

This was the last plenum under Khrushchev in which substantive foreign policy discussions became material for the power struggle at the top. The collective leadership and periodic rounds of Kremlin infighting were now history. Khrushchev, increasingly surrounded by yes-men, quickly found himself the decision maker in a vacuum. After removal of the "antiparty group" and Zhukov, the policy discussions at the Presidium quickly became ritualistic and sterile. An autodidact with extraordinary shrewdness and instincts, Khrushchev did not feel much need for outside expertise and advice. Whatever analytical branches still existed in the KGB, the Foreign Ministry, and the Central Committee withered away under Khrushchev's rule.[113]

Khrushchev's choice for Shepilov's successor was indicative of his intentions. Dour and uncharismatic Andrei Gromyko could not and did not shine on the

international stage. Khrushchev decided to be his own foreign minister—as he was his own chief of intelligence, minister of agriculture, and many other roles. The young and suave diplomat Oleg Troyanovsky, who became foreign policy assistant to Khrushchev in April of 1958, recalls that he immediately felt the coming of a major change in Soviet foreign policy.[114] The Soviet leader, triumphant in domestic politics, decided that he was ready for a foreign policy breakthrough. He was eager to demonstrate to the political elites and the military that he could outdo Stalin in expanding Soviet power and influence.