

The London School of Economics and Political Science

American Perceptions of Destalinisation and Leadership Change in the Soviet Union, 1953-56: From Stalin's Death to the Hungarian Uprising

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Declaration

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Abstract

Destalinisation was the process of enormous change that began in the wake of Stalin's death. Whilst it has been heavily studied from the Soviet perspective, it has not been examined from the American standpoint. This thesis fills that gap. It took until 1956 for Eisenhower and Dulles to alter their perceptions of the USSR and its ideology despite the years of change that followed Stalin's death. This thesis explains how the majority of policymakers rejected signals of change in the USSR until 1956. There were numerous reasons for this: domestic politics, relations with allies, and public opinion all played a role. But the key factor in preventing a change in mindset was an engrained perception of the Soviet leaders as Stalinists. While the Soviet leadership after 1953 rejected the hallmarks of Stalinism, the Eisenhower administration understood such signals of change within a mindset that saw the Soviets as unreconstructed communists, expansionist in aims, conspiratorial in methods, and, above all, out to destroy the West. This perception was in effect a mental 'dam', which held back any substantial perception change in Washington.

By 1956, however, a new perception of destalinisation, and by extension Soviet Communism, came into being. The Eisenhower administration no longer rejected out of hand the changes the Soviet leadership enacted both domestically and in foreign relations. Eisenhower and Dulles found sufficient evidence to question whether the rigid view of Soviet Communism and its aims was accurate or useful. The 20th Party Congress caused serious cracks in the 'dam'. Two of these 'cracks' were in the minds of Eisenhower and Dulles, who by the end of 1956 had changed their view of the Soviet leaders, and no longer regarded them as Stalinist. This change in perception would ultimately allow détente to take hold.

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Abbreviations

ACF: Admin and Chronological Files
 AD: Allen Dulles
 AmEmb: U.S. Embassy
 AsstSecState: Assistant Secretary of State
 AWDP: Allen W. Dulles Papers
 AWF: Ann Whitman File
 BEA: Bureau of European Affairs
 BIR: Bureau of Intelligence Research
 CIA: Central Intelligence Agency
 CDJ: CD Jackson
 CF: Confidential File
 CFRR: Council on Foreign Relations Records
 CPSU: Communist Party of the Soviet Union
 CREST: CIA Classified Records Search Tool
 CUL: Columbia University Library
 DCI: Director of Central Intelligence
 DDEL: Dwight D. Eisenhower Library
 DeptState: State Department
 DevSigProp: Developments Significant for Propaganda
 DPOPF: Daily Public Opinion Permanent File
 DRS: Division of Research, Soviet Union and Eastern Europe
 EDC: European Defence Community
 EPP: Eisenhower Public Papers
 ExSec: Executive Secretariat
 FRG: Federal Republic of Germany
 FRUS: Foreign Relations of the United States
 GDR: German Democratic Republic
 GFKP: George F. Kennan Papers
 JCS: Joint Chiefs of Staff
 JFD: John Foster Dulles
 JFDP: John Foster Dulles Papers
 JIG: Joint Intelligence Committee
 HSP: Harrison Salisbury Papers
 HL: Houghton Library
 ML: Mudd Library
 NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
 NSC: National Security Council
 NSCS: NSC Series
 OCB: Operations Coordinating Committee
 OIR: Office of Intelligence Research
 OPOS: Office of Public Opinion Studies
 OSA: Office of Soviet Affairs
 OSEEA: Office of Soviet and East European Affairs
 PCS: Press Conference Series
 PPS: Policy Planning Staff
 PR: Press Release
 RG59: Record Group 59
 RRLDP: Records Relating to Leadership and Diplomatic Personnel
 RoP: Records of the President
 SSF: Subject and Special Files
 SecState: Secretary of State

TCD: Time Correspondent Dispatches
TeleCon: Memorandum of Telephone Conversation
UnderSecState: Under Secretary of State
UN: United Nations
WHCF: White House Central Files
WHO: White House Office

A note on language and style: The thesis is written with British spellings, unless quoting an American, in which case American spelling is used. One concession to American style is that double inverted commas are used for direct quotations. Single inverted commas are used to signify emphasis or an alternative meaning of a phrase, i.e., 'new course', 'soft line', etc. Because of this, nested quotations also rely on double inverted commas.

Introduction

Josef Stalin's death had serious implications for U.S. foreign policy. Would the United States maintain its rigid Cold War policies toward the Soviet Union? If not, how would such a decision be formulated? Above all, would the new Soviet leadership differ from Stalin's? To complicate matters, such questions needed to be considered within a complex melange of domestic politics, relations with allies, and divisions of opinion within the Eisenhower administration.

Although the rapid deterioration of Soviet-American relations during the post-war years has been thoroughly documented, and American perceptions of the death of Stalin have been analysed, perceptions of the subsequent destalinisation in the USSR have not. In contrast to the dramatic changes in Soviet outlook, the central objectives and perceptions of U.S. foreign policy changed little in first years after Stalin's death. Why was the United States, which had developed a thorough evaluation of the threat posed by communism, not more perceptive of the changes taking place within the centre of the enemy it found so threatening?

This is the question at the heart of this thesis. The answer shows how the Eisenhower administration initially failed to understand the importance of destalinisation due to engrained perceptions of the Soviets as doctrinaire and expansionist. In the minds of those in the administration, leaders in Moscow remained Stalinists. Although key figures in the Eisenhower administration also considered other factors, such as domestic politics and relations with allies, overall it was these rigid perceptions in the face of events inside the USSR that were crucial.

Some Definitions

A few terms must be clarified. Firstly, 'destalinisation' means a number of different things, especially to scholars of Soviet history. In one sense it can be applied only to the period following the 20th Party Congress in which it was an active policy of the Kremlin to disavow much of Stalin's legacy.¹ This thesis uses a

¹ In the USSR "destalinisation" was never in public usage in this period. It was instead referred to as "overcoming the cult of personality". Polly Jones is perhaps the most renowned current scholar of the issue. She says the West defined it as "...the process of historical revisionism that dissected the

more expansive definition, however. It sees destalinisation as the process by which Stalin's successors moved away from the methods and style of rule that the West viewed as typical of Stalin, especially in the post-war years, for example: dictatorial control, the widespread use of terror, an antagonistic and obstructive foreign policy, and severe hostility towards the West.

In another sense the most important, and verifiable element of destalinisation from the very beginning was the vastly reduced role that Stalin's legacy played in the justification of Soviet policies. Ironically, Stalin's death marked the beginning of the end of the Stalin myth. His successors dismantled this cult almost immediately, and U.S. policymakers took note. Without Stalin to justify Soviet policies, the question of who was in control in the Kremlin became even more important as it was one of the few ways the U.S. could ascertain the future direction of the Kremlin. Inside the administration, officials expressed a great deal of concern over whether a 'power struggle' would ensue. For them, the question of who ruled in the Kremlin was integral to destalinisation itself. That is why this dimension is so predominant in the pages that follow.

Another term that needs clarification is the notion of 'American perceptions'.² For the most part, the thesis equates 'American' and 'U.S.' with the opinions of key voices in the administration, particularly President Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles. Dulles figures more prominently than Eisenhower, partly because he left a more extensive paper trail and so is more observable. By contrast, Eisenhower, as president, held far wider ranging

Stalin cult", whereas the Soviets objectified the issue as a struggle against the "cult of personality". She emphasises, however, that destalinisation had many more meanings and cut across all divisions. There are studies on areas as diverse as farming, architecture and criminal justice. Polly Jones, ed., *The Dilemmas of de-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge, 2006), 2-3; Polly Jones, ed., "From the Secret Speech to the Burial of Stalin: Real and Ideal Responses to de-Stalinisation," in *The Dilemmas of de-Stalinization: Negotiating Cultural and Social Change in the Khrushchev Era* (London: Routledge, 2006), 41-42; See also: Polly Jones, "From Stalinism to Post-Stalinism: De-Mythologising Stalin, 1953-56," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 4, no. 1 (June 1, 2003): . A meta-search of databases of peer-reviewed journals and books for "destalinisation" reveals hundreds of publications on topics as diverse as the satellites, North Korea, Gorbachev, literature, architecture, and even physiology. These are only the publications in English. However, all of these publications are from the perspective of the Soviets or former communist satellites. None examine the phenomenon from the Western perspective. Search performed in the BLPES search engine. It is a meta-search of all publications and journals available at the BLPES. The same search performed in WorldCat revealed 609 publications.

² Perception has received extensive treatment in both international relations and political psychology literature. The most famous, and perhaps thorough analysis is perhaps Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

responsibilities. In NSC meetings, he typically intervened only at the end of discussions, and so did not reveal his thinking in any details.³ He also delegated a great amount of work to NSC assistants and groups. When he did discuss foreign policy issues with his advisers, these meetings were often off the record.

At the same time, the views of those in the cabinet and NSC were also important, especially Allen Dulles, and CIA material figures prominently.⁴ Charles Bohlen was perhaps the savviest member of the administration towards destalinisation and features conspicuously. But a number of administration outsiders, both in academia, the press, or otherwise are included, especially when they influenced changing perceptions. Furthermore, the media offered a source of intelligence that was critical when dealing with a closed society. In this regard journalists could offer key insights into the Kremlin.

The Argument

Stalin's death marked the beginning of destalinisation. But this was a process of change within the USSR that the administration largely discounted until 1956. The reasons why the administration ignored it for so long can be traced to a number of factors. The most important of these was the engrained perception of the Soviet leaders, and of communism more generally. The relationship between the U.S. and the USSR since the end of the Second World War was rocky, to say the least. Much of the U.S. perception of the Soviets as inherently expansionist, repressive and violent came from longer term views of Russian tsarist imperialism. But communism gave it a new, more virulent potency, one that was antithetical to what those in government thought the U.S. stood for. The distrust and distain for Soviet Communism stretched back to the Bolshevik revolution.⁵

³ Anna Kasten Nelson, "The 'Top of Policy Hill': President Eisenhower and the National Security Council," *Diplomatic History* 7, no. 4 (October 1, 1983): 307–26; John Burke, *Honest Broker?: The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making*, 1st ed. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2009); John P. Burke, "The Neutral/Honest Broker Role in Foreign-Policy Decision Making: A Reassessment," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (2005): 229–58.

⁴ For the sake of clarity, when Allen Dulles is mentioned I refer to him with his full name in the first instance of the paragraph. When both he and John Foster Dulles are mentioned in the same paragraph, I refer to them with 'Allen Dulles' and 'Foster Dulles'.

⁵ An excellent overview of the origins of U.S. anti-Bolshevism is: David S. Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism: U.S. Intervention in the Russian Civil War, 1917-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), chap. 2.

Soviet actions in the interwar period were understood within a context of distrust and hatred for communism as an ideology that sought to destroy the basis of Western society. Thus after the aberration of the Grand Alliance was over, this mistrust reemerged and manifested itself in deteriorating relations. Therefore, the men in the administration, all of whom had various experiences with Soviet Communism, some from its earliest years, came to form hostile perceptions of the USSR. Communism was committed to violent expansion and the elimination of capitalism. It was the antithesis of American democracy. It sought the destruction of individual rights and subjugation to the state.⁶

It was with such a mindset that the Eisenhower administration not only immediately dismissed Stalin's death as of consequence for U.S. policy, but also rejected the Soviet leadership's 'new course' as tactical. Indeed, the administration thought the Soviet emphasis on peace validated a suspicious mindset: these changes were only made for the benefit of spreading revolution. The idea that there could have been changes of substance was wholly rejected. Soviet Communism in the minds of U.S. policymakers retained its expansionist goals, and thus they considered any change that appeared outwardly beneficial for improved relations as a ploy to undermine the West. This is in part due to the human tendency to fit new information into existing beliefs, thus causing bias. This is a normal response that allows quicker comprehension and reaction to events. However, it also makes existing beliefs resistant to change, which in turn can cause unrealistic expectations.⁷

Compounding this engrained hostility toward the USSR were other concerns. Domestic politics in the 1953-56 period meant that even giving pause to the changes in the USSR could be politically disastrous. This illuminates, in part, the response of the administration to Stalin's death and the transfer of power in the USSR. Given the politically cautious nature of both Eisenhower and Dulles, consideration of the beginning of destalinisation had to be done very carefully.

⁶ The terms 'Soviet ideology' and 'Soviet Communism' are used interchangeably. They are taken to mean the official doctrine that the CPSU sought to spread throughout the world, i.e., the 'party line' of Marxism-Leninism as defined by the Presidium and rubber stamped at Party Congresses. 'The Kremlin', 'Soviet leadership', 'the Soviets', 'the USSR' and the like all refer to the ruling elite of the CPSU.

⁷ The literature on belief systems is extensive. See for example: Robert Jervis, "Understanding Beliefs," *Political Psychology* 27, no. 5 (October 2006): 641-63; Richard Little and Steve Smith, *Belief Systems and International Relations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988).

The relationship between the U.S. and its allies in this period was another consideration. Western European leaders wanted to keep the U.S. involved in European defence for their own sake, and were aware of the isolationist tendencies of many in Washington. But European leaders also had to take into account the desires of their own electorates. The desire for peace often clashed with the interests of European defence. The rapid turnover of French governments in this period was a source of instability in allied policymaking. With Stalin's death, Europeans questioned how much of a threat the USSR remained. This was a situation the Soviets sought to exploit. For the most part European leaders were aware of this. But the British, French and West Germans all interpreted the changes in the USSR slightly differently in light of their own domestic imperatives and ideological predilections. Therefore, the French were most inclined to give change in the USSR the benefit of the doubt, whilst the West Germans under Konrad Adenauer rejected them outright. The British remained close to the U.S. initially in their interpretation, but their perceptions changed more quickly than did the Americans.

Hostility towards the changes in Moscow remained the prevalent perception (with the exception of a few voices in the U.S. administration) of the Soviet leaders and their objectives until late 1955, when doubt began to creep into the minds of Dulles and Eisenhower. More and more Soviet actions were given the benefit of the doubt, though Soviet intentions remained the object of suspicion.

When Khrushchev consolidated his position at the top of the Kremlin hierarchy, he instituted a renewed emphasis on neutralism. It was part of a larger campaign of peaceful coexistence, or even competitive coexistence. The Eisenhower administration felt extremely threatened by this. The shift away from militarism as a means of controlling communism abroad was unwelcome as far as the U.S. was concerned. It was more difficult to counter. Indeed, one of the perverse results of this was that destalinisation was in many ways discounted as a ploy meant to undermine the West.

The 20th Party Congress initially furthered this hostile American interpretation. The Congress enshrined changes to Soviet Communist doctrine that had been made since 1953. The U.S. found this dangerous. The 20th Party

Congress allowed the Soviets to publicly revise their ideology in a manner that made it much more accessible and attractive to neutralist sentiment and newly independent nations. These changes made the Soviets at once less *and* more menacing: less due to the emphasis on peace and reduced emphasis on revolution; but more dangerous since the U.S. thought these changes were a fig leaf meant to draw neutral nations closer to the Soviet orbit. As a result the U.S. fit these changes into existing perceptions of the Soviets. This led policymakers to reject that there had been any change at all in the Kremlin.

However, the 20th Party Congress was also a watershed moment. At first, various groups in the U.S. administration believed that nothing of substance would change in the USSR. Though they mostly considered the ideological changes announced in the opening days as an unwelcome development, they also saw that the denouncement of Stalin as a profound change. They felt that the Soviet leaders would not undertake such an action lightly. Thus, the administration closely scrutinised CPSU First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev's speech. As a result, many key U.S. policymakers, most notably Dulles, who in turn influenced Eisenhower, came to regard destalinisation as genuine. Whilst it could have detrimental impacts for the U.S., it also allowed for numerous opportunities. Regardless, the U.S. could no longer persist in the belief that nothing of substance had changed in the Kremlin.

After years of prodding for the U.S. to undertake a serious evaluation of the changes in the Kremlin there was finally a serious shift of perspective at the top. Dulles himself accepted that the Soviet leaders were not the Stalinists he thought they were. Crucially though, he expressed these thoughts only in private. This is not to say that a good measure of doubt about the changes of destalinisation remained. To be sure, in public the administration expressed such doubts frequently, where the refrain remained that the changes in the Kremlin did little to alter the situation. But as 1956 progressed more and more documents show key members of the administration accepting the fundamentals of destalinisation as changing the nature of the USSR's interaction with the world- to both the advantage and disadvantage of the West.

The new conception of destalinisation as held by Dulles and others was challenged by the unrest in the satellites. This led many in the administration to

reassert that nothing had truly changed in the Kremlin. Yet in the wake of the uprising in Hungary there was no mention by Eisenhower or Dulles of the Soviets 'reverting' to Stalinism. Instead, the uprisings seemed to convince them that Stalinism was definitively gone, even if the Soviets would continue to rely on force when necessary.

Thesis Scope and Structure

As mentioned, the term destalinisation can conjure up various meanings. This was also a period of transition and flux in the Cold War, and therefore the scope of the thesis must be made clear. It covers the period from Stalin's death in 1953 until the weeks following the Hungarian Uprising in 1956. However, the focus is mostly on the years 1955-56. This is for a few reasons. Firstly, the 1953 period has been covered well by a number of scholars. Secondly, 1954 was a particularly poor period for documentation. Lastly, the sense in the administration that something was indeed changing in the USSR became more prevalent through 1955, and then truly came into its own in 1956. Therefore, the bulk of the thesis focuses on 1956.

The thesis is an examination how of U.S. perceptions towards the Soviets changed in this period. This means two things for its scope. Due to the nature of examining perception, there is necessarily some discussion of Soviet foreign and domestic policy. However, it must be borne in mind that this is only in order to illuminate the positions and mindsets of those in the Eisenhower administration. This is not a study in Soviet history. Furthermore, whilst domestic U.S. politics certainly played a role in the speed of changing perceptions and their expression, this thesis examines how those in the Eisenhower administration looked 'outward'. Again, domestic issues often influenced this, but they will be examined only insofar as they effected foreign perceptions, and not in and of themselves.⁸

⁸ An excellent explanation of the interface between international and national history, as well as the role of individuals (which features heavily in this thesis) is: Frank Costigliola and Thomas G. Paterson, "Defining and Doing the History of United States Foreign Relations: A Primer," in *Explaining the History of American Foreign Relations*, 2nd Edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004) This thesis cuts across such definitions. Although it looks primarily at U.S. foreign relations history, it does so in a way that necessarily takes into account international trends and events, as well as individual, yet international, experiences of those involved in the thesis.

The third world was of increasing relevance to the Cold War in this period. However, limits must be set on the scope of a PhD thesis, and this falls outside of what was possible. The role of the third world for U.S. perceptions of the new Soviet leadership and destalinisation is indeed interesting, but it does not change the conclusions of this thesis.⁹

Stalin's Death and the Initial Leadership Transition, 1953-54

The first two chapters examine 1953 and 1954. This is necessary to provide context for the later chapters and highlight how far thinking progressed by 1956. In these years the overwhelming position towards the USSR remained one of hostility and mistrust. The administration rejected Soviet peaceful gestures after Stalin's death out of hand. This much has been researched before. However, in addition to providing context, these chapters provide a new narrative by examining the nascent trend of destalinisation, something other studies conspicuously fail to do. This period was the true genesis of destalinisation, and there were key actions taken by the new Soviet leadership in this regard. Some members of the U.S. administration were cognisant of this, and made initial attempts to bring these developments to the attention of Eisenhower and Dulles. However, the engrained perceptions of both these men, as well as the overwhelming rejection of any serious or lasting change in the Kremlin meant they were disregarded.

By the end of 1954 the consensus in the administration was that despite increasing evidence to the contrary, the Soviet leaders remained Stalinists committed to worldwide communist domination. The fundamental reason for this was that, as far as anyone could tell, Soviet objectives remained the same as they had been at the time of Stalin's death. That is to say, the Soviets remained

⁹ A good deal of research went into investigating the role of the Third World in U.S. perceptions of destalinisation. The Eisenhower administration was acutely aware of the danger posed by the Soviet advances into the Third World at this time. It interpreted destalinisation as (in part) a way of sweetening economic and military aid packages by concurrently altering Soviet ideology in order to make it more attractive. This would at once entice neutrals and developing nations by offering them assistance, and, crucially, making the Soviet model and ideology more attractive. The administration well recognised the danger this posed. See: Weston Ullrich, "The Eisenhower Administration, Destalinisation and the Soviet Third World Offensive, 1954-56" paper presented at Society for the History of American Foreign Relations Conference, Arlington, VA, June 21, 2013, and: Robert J. McMahon, "The Illusion of Vulnerability: American Reassessments of the Soviet Threat, 1955-1956," *The International History Review* 18, no. 3 (September 1996): 591-619, doi:10.1080/07075332.1996.9640755.

communists. Therefore, any changes made by the Kremlin were regarded by the administration as mere window dressing.

Destalinisation as a Source of Increased Danger

This portion of the thesis focuses on the period between 1954 and 1956. During this period the administration increasingly accepted that destalinisation was not a 'red herring', but was indeed something the Soviet leaders were advocating as a policy in itself. However, the administration as a whole continued to assert that the purpose of any change in the USSR was to undermine the West. So whilst there was increased acceptance of the USSR moving away from Stalinism, the conclusion was that this only made the USSR and its ideology more dangerous to the U.S.

Chapter three addresses the ouster of Malenkov from the Premiership and Khrushchev's consolidation of power in the Kremlin. The overall emphasis is on debates in the administration surrounding whether Khrushchev's ascent meant there would be a return to Stalinist style dictatorship, or whether collective leadership in fact remained in force. But I argue that these debates mattered in changing perceptions. If Khrushchev was solidifying a dictatorship then those who felt there was never any serious change away from Stalinism would be confirmed in their belief that despite the changes in the USSR, the objectives of the Kremlin remained unaltered. In contrast, those who felt that collective leadership was still in force thought that the changes in the Kremlin since 1953 were not reversed by Khrushchev's ascendance. They urged the administration to take a hard look at the Soviet new tactics in an effort to better understand how to counter the revised Soviet foreign policy line.

1955 presaged a number of important changes in Soviet foreign policy that would come into full blossom at the 20th Party Congress and these are addressed in chapter four. One of these was the re-emergence of Lenin as the key figure to cite for doctrinal questions. This was a key form of destalinisation which the administration took note of. Indeed, 1955 presented the administration with a number of Soviet foreign policy moves that challenged the existing perception of the leaders as unchanged Stalinists. The rapprochement with Tito, overtures to neutrals, and the Soviet offensive into the developing world were among these. But rather than rethink their perceptions of Khrushchev and others, the

administration instead found it easier to fit these new patterns into the existing mindset towards the Soviet leaders. Ironically, Soviet ideology, as far as the U.S. understood it, was key in this.

The newfound emphasis on peaceful coexistence was another development that unnerved the administration. It was understood to be part of a larger scheme to gain favour among neutrals across the globe. Though qualitatively different from the Stalin era, the fact that Stalin had frequently used images of peace in his propaganda caused the administration to doubt the veracity of the Soviet commitment to peace. Furthermore, since this shift was naturally meant to benefit the USSR, many in the administration dismissed it. Here I show that changes in the USSR would only be taken seriously if detrimental to it.

The most important development, however, came at the end of 1955 after the Geneva Conference. I show that it was at this point that Dulles and Eisenhower first expressed faint optimism that the Soviets had indeed changed away from Stalinism and were in fact a new breed of Soviet leaders, one that the U.S. could productively cooperate with. This trend would develop further over 1956.

The 20th Party Congress and the Genesis of a Changed Perception of the USSR

Chapter five deals directly with the 20th Party Congress. First the views of various groups within the administration prior to the Congress are assessed in order to present the reader with the perceptions of the administration prior to the Congress. Then, initial reports and assessments of the Congress are examined. Key to these are the issues of whether the Congress would present the administration with any significant changes from the Soviets. Initial reports of the Secret Speech are scrutinised in this regard in order to provide context for the later revelations of the Secret Speech.

The opinions of key allies and non-aligned nations are taken into consideration as they act as a foil to the U.S. understanding of the 20th Party Congress. The influence of domestic politics is evaluated. Finally, the initial U.S. propaganda line is discussed as it was the beginning of an important element of continuity through the remainder of 1956.

The 20th Party Congress ushered in a new level of urgency to destalinisation. Chapter six illustrates how the administration quickly became

aware that anything representative of Stalin's legacy was to be destroyed. But conclusions varied. Some thought the U.S. should wait to see what the Secret Speech and destalinisation represented; while others were more bullish and ready to dismiss it as yet another ploy to undermine the West. Here I show that this was the point at which a new conception of the Soviet leaders began to gain ground. Dulles began to express privately to a small group that the Soviet leaders were in fact changed from the Stalinists he had previously thought they were. A number of other actors in the administration also voiced their concern that the administration was not properly evaluating the longer-term changes in the USSR that the Congress was highlighting.

When the U.S. finally obtained a copy of the speech it presented a potential propaganda coup, but debate ensued about how forcefully to use the speech to attack the Soviet leaders. This in turn provides a good indication of how various policymakers were approaching the effects of destalinisation on the U.S. This was because using the speech to attack Soviet intentions was in many ways contrary to the policy of encouraging evolutionary change in the USSR. As a result of the disagreement of how forceful propaganda should be towards the Soviets, the U.S. only distributed the speech, rather than relying on more innovative ways to exploit it concocted by a number of agencies. Chapter seven argues that part of the lack of action was down to the caution of Eisenhower and Dulles. But the real driving force was that this was the same time that Dulles was becoming more and more assertive about his views that the Soviet leaders had indeed become a new breed. He was thus reticent to appear too hostile towards the USSR lest it backfire and strengthen hardliners in the Kremlin.

The most explosive result of destalinisation was the resistance to Soviet domination in Poland and Hungary in October-November 1956. Although the role of the U.S. in the uprisings has been examined, how the uprising affected U.S. perceptions of destalinisation has not. Chapter eight highlights the effects of these events on how the administration perceived of the changes in the Soviet bloc since Stalin's death, and specifically since the 20th Party Congress. The effect of the Poznan riots is analysed as it is useful in addressing how the recent knowledge of the contents of the Secret Speech changed U.S. perceptions of Soviet satellite control. Polish October and the Hungarian uprising are addressed insofar as they

were events heavily influenced by destalinisation. How the U.S. responded is considered in order to understand how perceptions of destalinisation influenced the U.S. response. Conversely, how open resistance to Soviet control affected U.S. perceptions of destalinisation is evaluated. Counter intuitively, the Hungarian Uprising did not reverse the change in perceptions of the Soviets that had begun to be accepted by Eisenhower and Dulles earlier in 1956.

Sources

Archives

The thesis draws on a number of sources. First and foremost are materials found in the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library and the National Archives and Records Administration. These, along with a number of published documents in various FRUS volumes form the bedrock of the thesis. Some of this material has been utilised before in other studies of the period. None of it, however, has been examined with destalinisation in mind. In addition to these sources are documents found in the CIA Records Search Tool (CREST). Many of these have not been used before. They offer an unvarnished look at how intelligence was gathered and analysed relating to the changes in the Soviet Union, and how it was compiled to form the briefs used by Allen Dulles at NSC meetings. Also of interest are contributions from CIA 'consultants' such as George Kennan, who remained on the CIA payroll through the period in question, and in this anonymous guise contributed to CIA opinions.

However, since the onset of the Cold War the Kremlin was a 'black box' for U.S. intelligence. As far as we know the CIA had no operatives in the Kremlin. In order to fill this gap the State Department relied heavily on the despatches of the few American and British correspondents in Moscow. The papers of Harrison Salisbury, long-time Moscow correspondent for the *New York Times* were consulted to investigate this. His papers highlight the collaboration between some in the press in Moscow and the embassy there, and his role as a frequent source of intelligence for Ambassador Charles Bohlen. In addition, the State Department's Bureau of Public Affairs kept a close eye on domestic and international media and its impression of U.S. policies. It is a great source for understanding how the State Department thought the press, both at home and abroad, perceived of it.

Salisbury is just one of administration outsiders that shed light on the initially static, and later changing perceptions of the administration. Other correspondents and public figures are woven into the thesis for this reason. Former government official Louis Halle maintained correspondence with Policy Planning Staff head Robert Bowie. We know from this, as well as from Allen Dulles' use of consultants outside the CIA, that the administration was listening to outsiders. They were a key source of intelligence, analysis, and indications of public opinion.

The relationship between correspondents of *Time* magazine and the State Department is indicative of this. The *Time* correspondent dispatches at the Houghton Library at Harvard University, part of long-time *Time* editor Roy Larson's papers, show the extent to which the press and State Department relied on each other are. Many, if not all, of the despatches cited are based on leaks from the Russian and Eastern European affairs sections of the State Department. The despatches provide a look into the mindset of those working under Dulles, and the political attitudes of these men. The despatches offer a great number of direct quotations from the 'leakers', and thus are not simply the interpretation of *Time* correspondents- though they do shed a light on those opinions as well. The men who acted as sources for these despatches did so under the condition that they remain anonymous. Most times, however, they are specifically named in the despatches, but with the instruction that they are 'not for attribution'. Thus there is likely a higher level of candour from the sources themselves. This does not mean, though, that they did not have a political axe to grind by leaking to *Time*, and this is illuminating. The *Time* despatches are novel in that they have not been used in this area before. They offer an alternative view of how perceptions of destalinisation and the Soviet leadership were resistant to change, and when they did start to change in the minds of men like Dulles, the resistance he would have encountered.

In order to gain perspective on U.S. policies and allies the British National Archives (Kew) were researched. These yielded important materials that shed light on how U.S. and British perspectives of destalinisation differed. FO series materials also contain numerous files from the UK delegation to NATO, which in turn highlight how the alliance, and its constituent countries, conceived of the

Soviet threat and the changes that it was seemingly undergoing. In all of the above the differing, or similar, opinions offer a useful foil to the materials found in U.S. archives. Though the differences in perceptions of the U.S. and those of its Western European allies were often minor, these differences help to point out that even in varying circumstances the same conclusions were often reached, and if they were not, what led to this divergence of opinion. Evidence from Western allies also illuminates that in the absence of firm intelligence much was left to interpretation, which in turn rested upon perceptions.

Memoirs and Contemporaneous Literature

Memoirs and literature published by those who were involved in policymaking were extensively consulted. It must be noted of course, that such sources contain numerous drawbacks. They are subject to the vagaries of ego and desires to burnish the image of those involved for posterity. Yet when compared to the archival records, they can often illustrate whether such historical actors were trustworthy or consistent in their reporting, and whether their memoirs are reliable. Eisenhower's autobiography is an example of such embellishment. He presents himself as a keen peacemaker. While I do not doubt he genuinely wanted peace, he was also keenly anti-communist. These convictions prevented his acceptance of change in the Kremlin until 1956. Furthermore, the documentary record, as has been examined by numerous historians (and is noted in the thesis) is often contrary to his reminiscences. Dulles, in contrast, died before he could write memoirs. Curiously there has been no comprehensive biography of him since Townsend Hoopes' *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* was published in 1974. Hoopes' work, while especially informative about the politics within the State Department, is also compromised by Hoopes' barely concealed distain for Dulles. The most useful memoir in this regard is Charles Bohlen's. The historical record confirms his accounts, and he often provides copies of documents to substantiate his narrative. Numerous other memoirs are used, as noted in the bibliography.

A number of newspaper and magazine accounts are consulted as well. These are often found within archival material, which is an indication that it was at the very least considered by policymakers at the time, and may have influenced their thinking. In addition, works by actors in and close to the administration who

published their thinking on matters relating to destalinisation are also included. These include works by Robert Tucker, Walt Rostow, and numerous other 'Kremlinologists'. These encompass both items published in popular magazines, as well as academic journals, as well as books often published long after the period in question. In the case of the latter I consider them somewhere between secondary literature and memoirs.

Historiography and Literature Review

Examining Stalin's Death

The death of Stalin has given rise to a considerable amount of scholarly literature from the Soviet perspective. Less has been done from a Western standpoint, but there are a number of studies that specifically address the larger question of whether Stalin's death was an opportunity for a 'chance for peace' or a 'first détente'. This thesis seeks to build on an area that is unexamined in such works: the beginnings of destalinisation and how the U.S. perceived and responded to it; and critically, how such perceptions changed when the period examined is extended to 1956.

The definitive volume on the period is *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* It brings together a number of scholars in the field to address this question from varying angles while highlighting several important themes.¹⁰ Among these was the fundamental nature of Stalin to the Cold War thus

¹⁰ Klaus Larres and Kenneth Osgood, eds., *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006) Other works which address the issue, but in a less specific manner, are discussed in the following section. There is a significant amount of articles on the topic that date from 1953-57, and therefore lack access to archives. They do provide an illustration of the mindset of academics and Sovietologists at the time. Consequently, they lie somewhere between primary and secondary sources. The most prolific authors were Philip Mosely, director of the Russian Institute at Columbia University, and Bertram Wolfe. See the comprehensive bibliography attached for a selection of their articles. Naturally there is a greater quantity of literature dealing with Stalin's death and destalinisation from the Soviet perspective. Notable works include: Geoffrey Roberts, "A Chance for Peace? The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953-1955," *CWIHP Working Paper Series*, no. No. 57 (n.d.), http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/WP57_WebFinal.pdf; Vladislav Zubok, *A Failed Empire: The Soviet Union in the Cold War from Stalin to Gorbachev* (University of North Carolina Press, 2009); Zolina Yelisaveta, "De-Stalinisation in the Mirror of Western Politics," *International Affairs (Moscow)* 3, no. March (1993): 115-25; Vladislav Zubok and Constantine Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996); William Taubman, *Khrushchev: The Man and His Era* (London: Free Press, 2005); Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007); Harry Hanak, *Soviet Foreign Policy Since the Death of Stalin*, World Studies Series (London: Routledge, 1972); Robert C. Tucker, "The Politics of Soviet De-Stalinization," *World Politics* 9, no. 4 (July 1957): 550-78; Mark Kramer, "The Soviet Union and the 1956 Crises in Hungary and

far. Mark Kramer rightly points out that he was integral to every East-West conflict between 1930-53. On a superficial level, this is obvious. Yet Kramer's remark that the absence of Stalin introduced fluidity into the international situation highlights the towering figure that he cut in East-West relations.¹¹ Stalin had built a system where both the party and state were completely subordinate to him.¹² Therefore, the substance of the Cold War in his lifetime was dependent on him. Kramer and most of the other contributors agree that 'peace' was not possible in 1953, and any chance there may have been was gone by the time of the East German Uprising in June 1953.¹³ However, they do not address the longer-term implications for U.S.-USSR relations that the origin of destalinisation unleashed.

Rather, many of the contributors to *The Cold War after Stalin's Death* focus on how the Eisenhower administration sought to capitalize on Stalin's death in order to gain an advantage in the Cold War. Among these is Ira Chernus, who makes many of the same arguments that he develops in *Apocalypse Management*.¹⁴ According to Chernus both Eisenhower and Soviet Prime Minister Georgi Malenkov constructed a Cold War discourse that divided the two, but also acted as a brake on tensions. This necessitated that both Eisenhower and Malenkov present themselves as the opposite of the other while being careful not to perpetuate the image that they were being obstinate in reaching an accommodation. Key to this rhetorical difference was the definition of 'peace' that each side operated from.¹⁵

Poland: Reassessments and New Findings," *Journal of Contemporary History* 33, no. 2 (April 1998): 163–214; Charles Gati, "The Stalinist Legacy in Soviet Foreign Policy," *Proceedings of the Academy of Political Science* 35, no. 3 (1984): 214–26.

¹¹ Mark Kramer, "Introduction: International Politics in the Early Post-Stalin Era: A Lost Opportunity, a Turning Point, or More of the Same?," in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), xiii.

¹² See chapter 9 in: Isaac Deustcher, *Stalin: A Political Biography*, 2nd Ed. (New York: OUP, 1966); Merle Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled*, Russian Research Center Studies; (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963), 265–71, 354–89.

¹³ Kramer, "Introduction," xiii–xiv.

¹⁴ Ira Chernus, *Apocalypse Management: Eisenhower and the Discourse of National Insecurity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Kramer, "Introduction," xxi. In contrast, Kramer points to the short duration of time between Stalin's death and the East German uprising as preventing an accommodation between the U.S. and USSR.

Eisenhower envisioned peace as a mode of separation.¹⁶ He presented the U.S. as a bastion of justice, hope and peace; while the USSR represented evil, war and slavery. The 'Chance for Peace' speech given in the weeks after Stalin's death showed such a worldview, and set the tone for Eisenhower's Cold War rhetoric towards the USSR.¹⁷ In contrast, Malenkov put forth a concept of peace as a mode of cooperation. This sort of 'peace' was intended to avoid war by Soviet participation in political and economic relationships.¹⁸ However, the U.S. viewed Soviet actions to create such relationships as deceptive. To those in the U.S. administration such actions towards 'peace' were the same as those needed to accumulate Soviet power. In this vein, Chernus mentions Stalin's assurances to the West that the peace movements were intended to prevent war, and not to undermine the West.¹⁹ With the prevailing atmosphere of mistrust between the U.S. and USSR, such a statement had the opposite effect, and the U.S. was not out of line with its allies in thinking the peace movements were bogus and intended only to undermine Western security.²⁰

Many in the administration had seen the peace movements 'movie' before. Such feelings of doubt combined with the perceptions of the Soviets as ideologically implacable and bent on the spread of communism made accommodation unlikely. Taken in tandem with the administration's policy commitments such as NATO, the EDC, and Mutual Security, any idea of quick policy changes after Stalin's death were stillborn.

In this regard, Lloyd Gardner argues that the U.S. was so committed to the reconstruction of West Germany, Japan, and the liberal-capitalist system, that the idea of meaningful change in the Soviet system was not taken seriously. There was no motivation to probe the Soviets and the peaceful gestures they had made since Stalin's death. Rather, the inclination, personified by Dulles, was to brush aside such gestures as 'tactical retreats', the roots of which laid in communist

¹⁶ Ira Chernus, "Meanings of Peace: The Rhetorical Cold War After Stalin," in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 96.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 101–103.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 97.

²⁰ Such a position had been advocated since 1948 by the British Government. See: Weston Ullrich, "Preventing 'Peace': The British Government and the Second World Peace Congress," *Cold War History* 11, no. 3 (2011).

doctrine.²¹ I argue that this inclination to dismiss changes in the Soviet system was not limited to Stalin's death, but proved to be the norm until 1956.

The Soviet attempts to mend fences, if indeed genuine, were flawed from the beginning since they were expressed in Stalinist rhetoric. Jeffery Brooks notes that in their effort to gain legitimacy, the new leaders had moved immediately to curb the excesses of Stalin's rule while simultaneously lessening domestic repression. However, the new leadership was so immersed in the Stalinist rhetoric that although they could 'walk the walk', they could not 'talk the talk'.²² The supreme irony is that in his 'Chance for Peace' speech Eisenhower specifically stated, "We care nothing for mere rhetoric. We care only for sincerity of peaceful purpose—attested by deeds."²³ However, the U.S. was so conditioned to words rather than action that it could not realise when the Soviets actually provided the deeds, many of which were undertaken in the 1953-56 period. The administration was itself so immersed in Stalinist discourse that they assumed the Soviet state was still an embodiment of Stalin, and must operate as such.²⁴ Any opportunity for improved relations was killed by the combination of the Soviet inability to express itself in anything other than Stalinist terms, and the inability of the U.S. leaders to interpret it through anything other than the 'lens' they had developed in the Cold War thus far.

The most recent scholarship reconsiders the period after Stalin's death not only as one of détente, but also as a chance to end the Cold War. Jaclyn Stanke argues that three positions towards the USSR existed: to destroy it; to reform it; or to come to an understanding (détente). Whilst she is broadly correct in identifying these three groups of thought, in reality they were never as solid as she implies. The 'membership' in any group varied depending on the exact period in question. Furthermore, those who desired the destruction of the USSR, CD Jackson and Walt Rostow she mentions specifically, had varying influence in the administration. At any rate, the idea of totally destroying the Soviet system was

²¹ Lloyd Gardner, "Poisoned Apples: John Foster Dulles and the 'Peace Offensive,'" in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 74-76.

²² Jeffery Brooks, "Stalin's Ghost: Cold War Culture and U.S.-Soviet Relations," in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 116.

²³ Eisenhower's speech to the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 16, 1953. Quoted from: W. W Rostow, *Europe after Stalin: Eisenhower's Three Decisions of March 11, 1953* (Austin :, 1982), 118-119.

²⁴ Brooks, "Stalin's Ghost," 115-116.

not a popular one for any number of reasons, and was not held by Eisenhower and Dulles. This is made clear in NSC-5505/1 when the decision is taken to actively seek *evolutionary* change in the USSR. Indeed, it even specifically states that the U.S. should not seek the destruction of the Soviet regime. But there is no mention of it in Stanke's work.²⁵ She only addresses the desire of some to reform the USSR. But the period in which this reformist tendency was greatest was after the Geneva Conference, and critically, after the 20th Party Congress. These are both absent in her work, and this thesis fills that gap.

Major Works Addressing the 1953-56 Period

There are a number of broader works that address questions or themes relevant to this study.²⁶ Richard Immerman's and Robert Bowie's *Waging Peace* is the most directly useful to scholars of the Eisenhower administration. They argue that the administration approached the Cold War through a 'bureaucratic-national security' framework. Largely positive, it is perhaps the apex Eisenhower revisionism. It does address Stalin's death and other issues that are of relevance, but only by discussing the immediate reactions of the administration to Stalin's death. It does not consider destalinisation or the role of perception. *Waging Peace* examines the balance between national security and the federal budget, asserting it was one of Eisenhower's primary concerns. Eisenhower considered reducing

²⁵ Jaclyn Stanke, "Stalin's Death and Anglo-American Visions of Ending the Cold War, 1953," in *Visions of the End of the Cold War in Europe, 1945-1990*, ed. Frederic Bozo et al. (Berghahn Books, 2012); "NSC 5505/1: Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities," January 31, 1955, WHO-SANSA, NSCS, Policy Paper Subseries, Box 14, NSC 5505/1 - Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities (1), DDEL.

²⁶ General literature dealing with the Eisenhower administration can be broadly divided into three categories. Influenced by the media and scarce primary sources available in the 1950-60s, the orthodox perspective describes Eisenhower as an inexperienced President, controlled by his advisors and exceeding only at postponing important issues. In contrast, the Eisenhower revisionists who rose to prominence in the 1970s generated a version of Eisenhower based upon newly released documents. They claim Eisenhower was not politically out of his league, but was rather a skilled politician operating via a "hidden-hand." See: Peter Boyle, *Eisenhower*, 1st ed., Profiles in Power (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), viii-xi; The term "hidden-hand" is taken from: Fred Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand Presidency: Eisenhower as Leader* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); In recent years a post-revisionist view has emerged which argues that revisionists placed too much emphasis on style rather than accomplishments in evaluating Eisenhower. See: *Eisenhower*; Elmo Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (Lawrence, KS: Regents Press of Kansas, 1979); Historiographical overviews of Eisenhower revisionism include: Stephen G. Rabe, "Eisenhower Revisionism: A Decade of Scholarship," *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 1 (January 1, 1993): 97-116; Robert F. Burk, "Eisenhower Revisionism Revisited: Reflections on Eisenhower Scholarship," *The Historian* 50, no. 2 (February 1, 1988); A more critical assessment of the revisionists is: Robert J. McMahan, "Eisenhower and Third World Nationalism: A Critique of the Revisionists," *Political Science Quarterly* 101, no. 3 (1986): 453-73 The literature surrounding revisionism, let alone Eisenhower in general is extensive, and the above is but a small selection.

military spending necessary to maintain a sound economy- something he felt was as important as a strong military in the struggle with communism. Immerman and Bowie note that Eisenhower roughly dubbed the economy, in combination with military and spiritual strength, the 'Great Equation'.²⁷ It was important enough that he began discussions with advisors on the issue prior to his inauguration.²⁸ But they do not investigate whether Eisenhower considered destalinisation to be an opportunity to reduce tensions, and therefore defence expenditures. Indeed, budget cuts were almost impossible to consider with Stalin in power, since he represented the embodiment of communist expansion to Americans. But they do not address why Stalin's removal from power was not treated as a chance for domestic U.S. reforms that relied on changes in the international situation. Indeed, the question of federal spending is an important one. Defence spending was also greatly affected by perceptions. The cynical narrative would assert that defence spending continued to increase since armament production was spread across various Congressional districts. This has some merit. But the defence industry was not yet widespread enough in Eisenhower's first term for it to hold the weight it would in later presidential administrations. Regardless, before anyone could countenance cutting defence spending a change in perceptions would need to take place. It would have been political suicide to cut defence spending when widespread perceptions of the Soviets remained so hostile. The documents show that neither Eisenhower nor Dulles considered destalinisation to be serious until late 1955 at the earliest. Thus it was not considered as an opportunity to reduce expenditures before the 1956 election. Indeed, even had perceptions substantially enough before the election was underway, it would have been a very dangerous line to toe during the campaign. To be sure, this is one of the reasons that Dulles kept his new opinion of the Soviets quiet after April 1956.

In contrast Kenneth Osgood's *Total Cold War* rejects that Eisenhower ever 'waged peace'. The change in Soviet policy away from the belief in inevitable war

²⁷ Robert Bowie and Richard Immerman, *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Cold War Strategy* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), 44, 75, 96-101; Eisenhower's spiritual and religious side is addressed in: Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 443-446. ; William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy, 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2008), 20-22.

²⁸ Rostow, *Europe after Stalin*, 22.

towards peaceful coexistence transformed the conflict into a psychological struggle.²⁹ Osgood argues that rather than seeking to resolve the struggle, the administration turned to propaganda. Stalin's death represented the first major opportunity to wage such 'Total Cold War'.³⁰

Osgood's argument that the end of the doctrine of the inevitability of war on the part of the Soviet's made the Eisenhower administration turn to propaganda is questionable in part. That the administration emphasised political warfare is indisputable. Chapter four shows how the turn away from the inevitability of war was something that the administration only grasped in 1954 as the Soviet leaders persistently stressed peace in their own rhetoric, and followed it up with various gestures towards improving relations. Even then it was subject to heavy doubt.

Osgood omits the fact that Stalin himself had spoken of peaceful coexistence, but was understandably not taken seriously by the Truman administration. The difference during the Eisenhower administration was that the new Soviet leadership backed up their rhetoric of peaceful coexistence with action. Osgood asserts that the 'peace offensive' was viewed in light of past hostile actions, and was thus interpreted to be disingenuous efforts to weaken the Western alliance.³¹ Nonetheless, Osgood is firmly focussed on the propaganda efforts of the administration, and does not address how the changing perceptions of the Soviet system altered the waging of 'Total Cold War.' This thesis fills such a gap by examining how perceptions influenced U.S. information campaigns. The output of U.S. diplomatic and information posts abroad remained hostile throughout 1956, but this does not mean there was no change in perception of the Soviets. As chapters six and seven illustrate, there was some debate over the direction of U.S. propaganda, but it fundamentally sent the same message of distrust of the Soviets. Ultimately the changed perceptions of Eisenhower and Dulles were too new to be expressed publicly, let alone in propaganda, where it would have run into resistance from many who had a vested interest in maintaining a hostile line.

²⁹ Kenneth Osgood, *Total Cold War: Eisenhower's Secret Propaganda Battle at Home and Abroad* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2006), 47-48.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 55.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

David Engerman's *Know Your Enemy* discusses the development of the role of Soviet 'experts'. While he does not deal directly with the perceptions of the U.S. leaders, his work illuminates the developing links in policymaking between academia and government during the Cold War. Engerman traces the creation of such institutions as the Center for International Studies (CENIS) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Russia Research Center at Harvard. CENIS was to play a role in the development of policy after Stalin's death, primarily via CD Jackson and Walt Rostow.³² While it is hard to determine the exact effect of these organisations on the perceptions of the administration, it seems unlikely that they would have been funded and consulted as frequently as they were if they were of no importance. However, the social science based reports generated by the 'Sovietologists' were often subject to criticism from Foreign Service professionals such as Charles Bohlen.³³

The worldview held by policymakers in the Eisenhower administration was greatly influenced by the actions of the Truman administration. Melvyn Leffler's *For the Soul of Mankind* offers useful lessons in this regard. Adhering to his national security thesis, Leffler discusses the public diplomacy of the Truman administration and the 'good versus evil' rhetoric that predominated. While this rhetorical device was good for gaining Congressional and public support for large budgets and the struggle against communism, Leffler argues that it also trapped subsequent administrations into a Manichean discourse with the USSR.³⁴

Addressing the question of why the 'chance for peace' after Stalin's death did not materialise, Leffler states that while the Cold War was expensive and fraught with danger, "...the clash of ideologies and the dynamics of the international system militated against the chance for peace." Since Eisenhower would not take the risks necessary to reach an accommodation after Stalin's

³² David Engerman, *Know Your Enemy: The Rise and Fall of America's Soviet Experts* (Oxford: OUP, 2009), 47-49. CENIS was often consulted by the CIA, but the exact nature of the interactions remain classified.

³³ *Ibid.*, 54; Yet Bohlen did not disagree with all of the findings of the Soviet experts. One crucial area of agreement was in the goals of the Soviet leaders. Both Bohlen and Merle Fainsod agreed that the modus operandi of the Soviet leaders was the maintenance of power, rather than expansion of communism. Bohlen consistently stressed this in his memoirs. Charles Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, [1st ed.] (New York: Norton, 1973), 40, 82-84, 178. While the accuracy of memoirs often suffers due to self-promotion, Bohlen's assertions related to this study can be verified in the archival record; Fainsod, *How Russia Is Ruled*, 87.

³⁴ Melvyn Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War*, 1st ed. (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 63-71.

death, Leffler contends that Eisenhower set out to 'win' the Cold War.³⁵ In contrast, *Waging Peace* asserts that Eisenhower's actions set the groundwork for détente. This thesis argues that it was not simply the actions of Eisenhower and Dulles that laid the groundwork for détente. Rather, it was their change in perceptions that was critical.

Foundations of American Perceptions of the USSR

In *The Cold War After Stalin's Death* Jeffery Brooks suggests that the gestures of the Soviets were dismissed in part due to the U.S. leaders perceptions of Stalin's legacy in the Soviet system. The interpretation of the 'new course' set by the Soviet leaders was predetermined in part by the concept of totalitarianism. Policymakers interpreted Soviet actions in light of their understanding of the Soviet system as totalitarian. Their understanding of totalitarianism was such that it could not distinguish between Stalin and the Stalinist system; though Stalin was gone, the system would remain. Therefore, the leadership succession would have little impact on the style of the regime.³⁶ Brooks is correct that perceptions played a role. I argue though, that they mattered more than he asserts, and the thesis shows the lasting effect was far longer than 1953. The hostile existing perception of the Soviet leaders mattered throughout the first Eisenhower administration and especially with regards to destalinisation. Brooks does not address this key issue. This needs to be examined not only since it has not been, but also since the question is of importance since we now know that Stalin's death was the genesis of destalinisation. Addressing the immediate period after his death without also considering the effects it would have on how destalinisation proceeded, and then how this effected U.S. perceptions is only telling half the story.

By the 1950's, a number of competing definitions of totalitarianism had emerged. Hannah Arendt postulated that totalitarianism was the product of the erosion of 19th century institutions such as hereditary classes, political parties, and nation-states, combined with the rise of modern technologies of power and a

³⁵ Ibid., 133.

³⁶ Brooks, "Stalin's Ghost," 118-119.

contemporary society unable to rule itself. This definition did not fit the USSR, but it did not prevent her ideas from having an impact in Washington.³⁷

Carl Friedrich attempted to reconcile Arendt's definition with the USSR, defining totalitarianism as an 'official ideology' with a 'single mass of true believers' controlled by a state apparatus with a monopoly on both violence and mass communication, and a systematic terror-based police force. A doctoral student of Friedrich's, Zbigniew Brzezinski, argued that the USSR was the model totalitarian state; unchanging in its principles. Brzezinski's idea found traction among those in the administration who did not see Stalin's death as a harbinger of change.³⁸ More recently, Marc Selverstone has examined the issue of totalitarianism in the creation of the idea of a communist monolith. He determines that U.S. (and British) leaders thought themselves as ordained as a force for good in the world.³⁹ This would only make it even more difficult to ponder a relationship with the Soviets.

Figures such as George Kennan questioned the utility of lumping together the Nazi and Soviet systems. But the trend to do so continued, reinforced by Stalin's actions between 1945-1953. To U.S. policymakers, the Sovietisation of Eastern Europe and the Korean War underlined the expansionist and totalitarian nature of the Stalinist (and therefore, Soviet) system.⁴⁰ This was aided by the background of those in the administration, who shared the Second World War as the defining event in their lives. H.W. Brands advanced the idea that this shared experience gave those in the administration a tendency to view all totalitarian regimes in the same light; thereby placing the lessons of the Second World War onto the struggle with the USSR. An outcome of this was a tendency to equate negotiation and appeasement.⁴¹ This proclivity towards drawing a direct link between Nazis and Soviets was rejected by Kennan. He deemed it the 'German-Nazi syndrome' and warned against fitting Soviet actions into a Nazi

³⁷ Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 207; Hannah Arendt, *The Burden of Our Time* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1951).

³⁸ Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 207, 209.

³⁹ Marc J. Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith: The United States, Great Britain and International Communism, 1945-1950* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2009), 195-198.

⁴⁰ Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 206, 208.

⁴¹ H.W. Brands, *Cold Warriors: Eisenhower's Generation and American Foreign Policy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 201-202.

framework.⁴² Kennan and others in the State Department who came of age in the 1920s and 1930s developed a perception of the USSR as hostile and expansionist far earlier than many of their later contemporaries in the 1950s would. Daniel Yergin notably labelled these the 'Riga axioms' due to Kennan's time spent there in the 1930s.⁴³

The reactions of the policymakers in the Eisenhower administration to the departures of the new Soviet leaders from Stalinist policy was shaped by their perceptions of Stalin and the system he had created. Believing, as many did, that Stalinism was the Soviet system, it was assumed his death would change little. Even the optimistic among Eisenhower's staff did not think there would be reliable change. On a practical level, the policymakers often thought there would be no change because the gestures of peace from the Kremlin had occurred before, with no lasting effects. The reticence to allow for change on a theoretical level is also quite compelling taken within historical context. Robert Jervis has written extensively on perception, most notably in *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*.⁴⁴ In addition, Jervis laid out three hypotheses that help explain the inability for the U.S. policymakers to adjust their positions to the radically new information coming to them about the USSR in 1953. According to Jervis, decision-makers:

- I. Fit new incoming information into existing frameworks and theories.⁴⁵
- II. ...err on the side of established views, and are closed to new information.⁴⁶

⁴² George Kennan, *Memoirs: 1950-1963*. (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1972), 91.

⁴³ Daniel Yergin, *Shattered Peace: The Origins of the Cold War and the National Security State* (London: Deutsch, 1978); Hugh De Santis examines the early lives of several foreign service officers to investigate the effect it had on their later careers. Among them are William Bullitt, Charles Bohlen and Kennan, who all served in Riga at the same time. He also stresses the importance of class and racism on their perceptions of the Soviets. *The Diplomacy of Silence: The American Foreign Service, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War, 1933-1947* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); The perceptions of the USSR were subject to frequent change between 1917 and the onset of the Cold War. Eduard Mark argues there have been four American interpretations of the USSR. He postulates that the American interpretation of the Soviet regime is less dependent on the actions of the Soviets than the ideologies of American themselves who place Soviet policies into their own political frameworks. Although not addressing the period 1947-53, or 1953-56, he provides an explanation of how attitudes towards the USSR changed over time for various domestic and international political reasons. This thesis agrees mental frameworks mattered, but Soviet actions in regard to changing perceptions of destalinisation were pivotal. "October or Thermidor? Interpretations of Stalinism and the Perception of Soviet Foreign Policy in the United States, 1927-1947," *The American Historical Review* 94, no. 4 (October 1989): 937-62.

⁴⁴ Jervis, *Perception*. In particular, see chapter 2.

⁴⁵ Robert Jervis, "Hypotheses on Misperception," *World Politics* 20, no. 3 (April 1968): 455.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 459.

- III. Actors can more readily assimilate new information if it is introduced little by little, rather than all at once. When it comes all at once, it can be too much for the framework, and will be rejected.⁴⁷

Jervis' hypotheses are a useful framework for understanding the actions of the U.S. leaders in response to the Soviet change in policy towards the West. Stalin's death was so sudden, and the changes in policy so abrupt that even the U.S. decision makers who were receptive to the idea of change in the USSR found it hard to believe change was likely. In time though, perceptions of the Soviets did change. By 1956, even Dulles agreed that things were changing for the better, even if he only voiced this behind closed doors. Though the changes after Stalin's death were often dramatic, destalinisation was akin to water accumulating behind a dam. It took until 1956 and the earthquake of the Secret Speech to breach its walls.

Deborah Welch Larson draws attention to the role of trust through a series of 'missed opportunities' in U.S.-Soviet relations. According to Larson, both U.S. and Soviet leaders failed to seize opportunities to cooperate due to "...mutual mistrust, based on ideological differences, historical baggage, and intuitive mental biases."⁴⁸ Larson addresses a number "trust issues" that are relevant to the U.S. position after Stalin's death. For example, she points out that the value of deception can be much higher than the value of truth. As a consequence, aggressive states have an incentive to *appear* to be conciliatory in order to lull others into a false sense of security.⁴⁹ This is precisely what Dulles, and indeed many Western leaders, thought the Soviets were attempting through the peace offensive after Stalin's death. Dulles interpreted Soviet actions in a more doctrinaire Marxist sense than did the Soviet leaders themselves due to his literal reading of Stalin's *Problems of Leninism*.⁵⁰ Since states form long-term perceptions of other states based on their history, the U.S. reaction to the peace offensive was negative due to the perception of the USSR as aggressive and untrustworthy.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Ibid., 465-66.

⁴⁸ Deborah Welch Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: US-Soviet Relations During the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 5; A broader treatment of the issue is her earlier work: *Origins of Containment: A Psychological Explanation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

⁴⁹ Larson, *Mistrust*, 13.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 44-45.

⁵¹ Ibid., 21-23.

In light of the above, it is not difficult to understand why the U.S. was sometimes suspicious, but more often dismissive, of the changes in the Soviet system. By 1956, the administration was more receptive to the notion that the Soviets had changed. Yet the idea that the Soviets were using overt destalinisation as a way to undermine the West was still present.

Most of the work on perception has been theoretical in nature, and therefore has not been applied specifically to the period in question. Larson's work addresses this period, but not the issue of destalinisation. I contribute a new perspective by applying it from a historical standpoint to illustrate one of the ways the administration initially failed to appreciate the scope of the changes in the USSR and the ramifications for U.S. foreign policy, and how these perceptions changed in 1956.

Personalities

While the role of perception has been studied in a broad manner, or in a more focussed way using specific international events, the study of the people who held these perceptions is more limited. In the Eisenhower administration, the overwhelming amount of literature focuses on Eisenhower and Dulles.

The archives of the Eisenhower administration have been open for decades so Eisenhower's memoirs are no longer the important source they once were. They suffer from the typical drawbacks, for example, hindsight and a desire to improve the author's image. Taken in combination with the documentary record though, they are at times illuminating. For instance, Eisenhower claims that in the wake of Stalin's death:

The new leadership in Russia, no matter how strong its links with the Stalin era, was not completely bound to blind obedience to the ways of a dead man...Consequently, a major preoccupation of my mind through most of 1953 was the development of approaches to the Soviet leaders that might be at least a start toward the birth of mutual trust founded to cooperative effort...⁵²

Eisenhower followed this by stating that within a month the Malenkov regime was making 'startling departures' from Stalinist policy.⁵³ This account conflicts with the documentary evidence that indicates Eisenhower was wary of Soviet moves, and the consensus in the administration that the new leadership would

⁵² Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change* (London: Heineman, 1963), 144.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

maintain Stalinist policies. By the time Eisenhower's memoirs were published in 1963, the significance of the changes that occurred in the USSR during Eisenhower's presidency would have been apparent. Thus, it is understandable that Eisenhower would seek to appear more perceptive of the changes wrought by destalinisation.

The best known of the Eisenhower biographies are the volumes written by Stephen Ambrose.⁵⁴ Ambrose's work makes short shrift of certain events, such as Stalin's death and the 'Chance for Peace' speech, which receive little more than a page each.⁵⁵ Ambrose does consider certain aspects of Eisenhower's background that shed light on the period following Stalin's death. His discussion of Eisenhower's years as a general staff officer is indicative of his reorganisation of the NSC and his demands for an orderly and process driven administration.⁵⁶ However, the useful sections are easily overshadowed by his rose-tinted view of certain issues. Ambrose takes at face value initiatives such as Atoms for Peace and Open Skies, describing the latter as the most serious and far-reaching disarmament proposal ever made by a president.⁵⁷ He never considers if either Eisenhower or others in the administration had ulterior motives with these proposals. Amplifying these omissions are careless errors, such as referring to Stalin's successor as 'Nikolai' Malenkov.⁵⁸

There is no shortage of general studies of Eisenhower, but many distinctly lack scholarship in reference to U.S.-Soviet relations, or, where they do address it, are often in error. For instance, Elmo Richardson's earlier book on the Eisenhower Presidency addresses the importance of the death of Stalin to the administration, but lists the date of the event as 11 April, rather than 5 March 1953. For a political study of the Eisenhower Presidency it is startling that Stalin is mentioned only twice, considering the effect his legacy had both on foreign and domestic U.S.

⁵⁴ The reliability of Ambrose's scholarship has been an issue for some years due to admitted plagiarism. For the most recent revelations specifically regarding his work on Eisenhower, see: Richard Rayner, "Channelling Ike," *The New Yorker*, April 26, 2010, http://www.newyorker.com/talk/2010/04/26/100426ta_talk_rayner. Accessed October 19, 2014.

⁵⁵ Stephen Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), 311, 325; *Eisenhower, Vol. 2: The President, 1952-1969* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), 91-93.

⁵⁶ Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 87.

⁵⁷ Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Vol. 2: The President, 1952-1969*, 257-59, 264-65; Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 343, 393. It would be difficult to argue that his assertion is correct, which he maintains in his updated and abridged biography written in 1991. Ambrose would have known of the INF Treaty, START, and the near success of the zero option at Reykjavik by President Reagan.

⁵⁸ Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 323, 386, 620.

politics.⁵⁹ The pro-U.S. stance and Eisenhower flattery in other studies is such that the influence of certain events is vastly overstated. *Dwight David Eisenhower and American Power* cites the 'Chance for Peace' speech as forcing the Soviets to negotiate over both Austria and Korea, while the East German uprising is reduced to being the result of Germans rejoicing in the streets after Stalin's death.⁶⁰

If brevity of historical analysis and historiographical clarity were most valued among Eisenhower histories, then Peter G. Boyle's *Eisenhower* would be near the top of the list. Boyle lucidly summarizes the debate between historians who think that Eisenhower lacked vision for failing to meet with Malenkov after Stalin's death, and those who felt that a meeting would have made little difference. Detractors point out that since Stalin's successors were thought to be little different than Stalin himself, the meeting would be at best a waste of time, and perhaps worse, expose the administration to both foreign and domestic dangers. It could have also caused increased expectations of peace, thereby reducing commitment to rearmament and the European Defence Community, or opened the administration to charges of appeasement and being soft on communism.⁶¹

In a manner contrasting the orthodox and revisionist schools, Fred Greenstein addresses Eisenhower's leadership and administrative abilities by arguing that Eisenhower used five methods to exercise his presidential power without "flexing his muscles".⁶² Among these, Eisenhower's refusal to attack or criticise 'personalities' in order to help promote a non-political image stands out in relevance to this study. This allowed him to garner support in Congress while maintaining his image as above politics, thus enhancing his popularity. It also allowed him to avoid getting into disagreements that were disadvantageous to his administration.⁶³ However, this manner of political manipulation limited his ability to counter potentially harmful trends in domestic politics that had serious

⁵⁹ Richardson, *The Presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower*, 61, 217.

⁶⁰ William Pickett, *Dwight David Eisenhower and American Power* (Wheeling Ill.: Harlan Davidson Inc., 1995), 107, 112-113. For other adulatory works on Eisenhower and the Administration see: Piers Brendon, *Ike: The Life and Times of Dwight D. Eisenhower* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1987); Robert Burk, *Dwight D. Eisenhower, Hero and Politician* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986); Merlo J. Pusey, *Eisenhower the President* (New York: Macmillan, 1956).

⁶¹ Boyle, *Eisenhower*, 42-43.

⁶² Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand*, 57-58.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 25-30.

implications on foreign relations, especially vis-à-vis the USSR. Refusing to use 'personalities' left him looking weak in the face of demagogues such as Senator Joseph McCarthy, while preventing actions that could have limited the damage McCarthy did to foreign relations. The atmosphere that anti-communist hysteria promoted made any suggestion of rapprochement with the Soviets a political third rail.

Also among Greenstein's 'methods' is Eisenhower's habit of delegation of authority.⁶⁴ Stemming from his years as a general staff officer, such delegation has often been misconstrued by detractors of Eisenhower, especially in the years prior to the opening of his presidential archives. The orthodox view was that Eisenhower handed over control of foreign policy to Dulles. Revisionists point out that Dulles was in daily contact with the president regarding important events and rarely, if ever, made an important decision without conferring with him first. Robert Divine, for one, disagrees with not only the notion that Dulles made foreign policy, but with the notion that Eisenhower was a passive president in general.⁶⁵ Divine argues that the Eisenhower administration had a "schizophrenic" foreign policy reflected in Eisenhower's peaceful, measured statements and Dulles' often bombastic anti-Communist rhetoric. Divine claims this helped appease two domestic political blocs: the internationalist wing of the Republicans and some Democrats, versus the anti-communist GOP 'old guard' and McCarthyites.⁶⁶ Yet at the very least, such a strategy (if indeed it was) sent mixed signals to the Soviets, who would have interpreted such belligerence on the part of Dulles as coming from 'imperialist' or 'Wall Street' elements controlling the administration. This was often done publicly, and such rhetoric was typical of the Stalin years. Therefore, any caution exercised on the part of the new Soviet leadership due to Dulles' statements would have been seen as foot-dragging by the U.S. administration, thus reinforcing the perception that the Soviets had not changed since Stalin's death.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid., 88-92.

⁶⁵ Robert A Divine, *Eisenhower and the Cold War* (New York: OUP, 1981), 20-21.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 106.

⁶⁷ The Soviets often publicly characterised U.S. policies that were detrimental to them as due to 'imperialist-capitalist elements'. This restatement of Stalinist rhetoric also would have reinforced Dulles' belief that the new Soviet leaders were slaves to communist doctrine. See discussion of the lack of change in rhetoric on page 27.

Dulles' manner of conducting U.S. foreign policy has been thoroughly studied, especially regarding the formulation of his beliefs and perceptions. Ole Holsti has approached the 'Dullesian enigma' from a combination of international relations and psychology. Holsti's approach is similar to Jervis' in this respect, except whereas Jervis is interested in the 'macro', Holsti focuses on the 'micro' level of a specific personality.

"Will the real Dulles Please Stand Up" suggests that Dulles' lawyerly background caused him to treat each crisis as a case he was determined to win. But in so doing, he lost sight of the overall struggle each 'case' existed within, and the long-term considerations of U.S. foreign policy.⁶⁸ While the debates about Dulles' legal training are as well trod as those regarding his religion, Holsti makes an important point that complements Jervis' argument regarding frameworks, which in turn adds to my argument: If Dulles was concerned only with the short term, he was unlikely to question the mindset that the Eisenhower administration was using to approach the Cold War. Thus there was little questioning of the effects that Stalin's death and destalinisation had on such a framework until destalinisation became irrefutable in 1956.

Holsti's 'Operational Code' is a detailed examination of Dulles' belief system.⁶⁹ Written in 1970, it represents much of the orthodox view of Dulles. Holsti lists forty-one beliefs that were instrumental in Dulles' formulation of foreign policy. A number of themes emerge that are useful for understanding the period in question. For instance, he addresses Dulles' conviction that "Social cohesion is dependent on external enemies", and by extension, that "[i]t is easier to build unity upon fear rather than upon hope."⁷⁰ Such 'beliefs' offer two ways of understanding Dulles' role in the formulation of U.S. policy during the period of destalinisation. Firstly, numerous scholars have shown that Dulles felt enemies were necessary for the cohesion of the Western alliance as well as for preparing

⁶⁸ Ole R. Holsti, "Will the Real Dulles Please Stand Up," *International Journal* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1974): 37.

⁶⁹ Ole Holsti, "The 'Operational Code' Approach to the Study of Political Leaders: John Foster Dulles' Philosophical and Instrumental Beliefs," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 3, no. 1 (March 1970): 123-57.

⁷⁰ See specifically beliefs three and 38. *Ibid.*, 127, 150.

the American people for lasting conflict with the USSR.⁷¹ Therefore, he would have sought to downplay the effect that Stalin's death and destalinisation would have had on U.S.-Soviet relations. Secondly, it would have influenced his perception of the effect of Stalin's death. Dulles' perceptions of the USSR as an enemy were so integral to his belief that he likely would have minimised contradictory information while emphasising information that confirmed the Soviets as enemies.⁷² Therefore, his conviction regarding the integral nature of enemies to the Cold War framework illuminates why established Cold War perceptions prevented any change in U.S. policy in this period, or even open-minded investigations into the nature of the changes in the USSR.

Dulles is an ideal case study in the persistence of perceptions due to his reliance on communist doctrine to explain and predict the intentions and actions of the USSR. For example, Dulles:

...repeatedly asserted that peace and security were threatened by an international movement responsive to the needs of an elite steeped in the doctrines of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, rather than by a coalition of states promoting...national interests...In particular, he equated Stalin's *Problems of Leninism* with Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as a masterplan of goals, strategy, and tactics.⁷³

By sheer quantity alone *Problems of Leninism* was more important to Dulles than even the Bible. Numerous scholars have underlined its significance.⁷⁴ Communist doctrine served as the touchstone for Soviet actions. Indeed, it was more important to Dulles than to the Soviet leaders themselves and helps account for his rejection of the advice of Soviet specialists.⁷⁵

The consistency that communist writings offered Dulles in interpreting Soviet intentions rendered him incapable of interpreting real change when it came. The Soviets had an established policy of 'zigzag' during negotiations that

⁷¹ Ibid., 127-28; Townsend Hoopes, *The Devil and John Foster Dulles* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974), 162.

⁷² This is similar to Jervis' second hypothesis mentioned above. See: Jervis, "Hypotheses," 459.

⁷³ Holsti, "Operational Code," 129-30.

⁷⁴ Indeed, Dulles often referred to *Problems of Leninism* as "his Bible", see: Hoopes, *Devil and Dulles*, 64; TeleCon: SecState and DCI, July 10, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1988), 1208; Dulles owned four copies of *Problems of Leninism*: one each in his office, home, by his bedside and for travelling. See: Frederick W. Marks, *Power and Peace: The Diplomacy of John Foster Dulles* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), 100-101.

⁷⁵ The centrality of communist doctrine to Dulles' mindset has been pointed out by Holsti, "Operational Code," 136; Bohlen recounts that while recalled from Moscow, Dulles used *Problems of Leninism* to explain what he thought was an evolving power struggle in the Kremlin. Bohlen explained the irrelevance of communist doctrine to the behaviour of the new Soviet leadership. Dulles was not receptive. See: Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, 356.

was well known to both Dulles and Eisenhower. Dulles however, attributed this solely to doctrine.⁷⁶ When he later attributed it to tactics, it was only as a result of communist doctrine teaching such tactics. Paradoxically, it was Dulles' devotion to communist mantra that made him unable to distinguish between bargaining tactics and the doctrine of tactical retreat outlined in communist literature.

Furthermore, Dulles was attracted to universalism as a foundation for his worldview. To Dulles the Cold War was a struggle between two universalist ideologies. There was no room to compromise. Dulles' universalist fundamentalism created an overly rigid worldview that prevented the accurate interpretation of changes in the Soviet system. Dulles' universalism is also addressed by Townsend Hoopes. Hoopes supports the idea that Dulles viewed the Cold War in black and white ideological terms, quoting Dulles as stating "[w]e have enemies who are plotting our destruction...Any American who isn't awake to that fact is like a soldier who's asleep at his post."⁷⁷

Hoopes relies heavily on Dulles' pious nature in his portrait of the Secretary of State. He renders Dulles as defining foreign policy explicitly through morality. Dulles viewed the struggle with communism as akin to a Christian struggle with the heathen. This in turn contributed to his tendency to see issues in absolutes.⁷⁸ Hoopes notes that Dulles' absolutism did not restrict him in terms of his actions. Rather, he claims that Dulles was a pragmatist who defined broad goals in terms of morality, but whose individual actions were politically determined.⁷⁹ Both of these statements contribute to understanding the administration's response to Stalin's death and destalinisation. Since Dulles tended to view issues in absolutes, and ultimate goals in terms of morality, he would have understood the struggle with communism as one that was based upon right and wrong. Consequently, Dulles disregarded any change in the Soviet system that did not alter the fundamentally evil nature of the system. Therefore, Dulles saw Soviet goals were as unchanged. Additionally, Dulles' tactical nature would have led him to believe that giving the changes in the USSR a chance to 'pan out' would have been a mistake since it would have jeopardized

⁷⁶ Marks, *Power and Peace*, 100-101; Holsti, "Operational Code," 136.

⁷⁷ Hoopes, *Devil and Dulles*, 161.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁷⁹ Townsend Hoopes, "God and John Foster Dulles," *Foreign Policy*, no. 13 (1973): 160.

the coherence of the coalition and the viability of the European Defence Community. These conclusions explain Dulles' conviction that Stalin's death and destalinisation would not change the USSR, or the nature of the U.S. struggle against communism. According to Hoopes, Dulles viewed Stalinism as an aberration; the U.S. must be prepared to subdue the whole communist system regardless of who led it. Dulles construed Soviet gestures after Stalin's death as due to U.S. pressure. This supports Hoopes' conclusion that Dulles was both morally and tactically dedicated to the Cold War.⁸⁰

As archives have opened, views of Dulles have become more nuanced. John Lewis Gaddis exemplifies this change. He repudiates Hoopes' view of Dulles as a rigid ideologue with a narrow and monolithic view of communism.⁸¹ Gaddis disagrees that Dulles dismissed any chance of change in the USSR after Stalin's death. Gaddis points to the short lived peace proposal discussed between Eisenhower and Dulles in autumn 1953, and Dulles' suggestion of a *quid pro quo* with the Russians over Korea and Germany as proof of a more open-minded Dulles.⁸² Gaddis' views are hard to substantiate though, as the discussion of the peace overture towards the Russians never gained any momentum. The idea of negotiating over Germany and Korea could also support the understanding of Dulles' as tactically pragmatic. However, Gaddis is broadly correct when he insists that a close reading of Dulles' private writing and statements shows that he did not consider the USSR permanently Stalinist and thought change was possible. This is especially true from 1956 onwards.⁸³ Gaddis' mistake, though, is insinuating that he felt this was possible all along. It is the changes in the period 1953-56 that are integral to the change in perceptions of the Soviet system that allowed improved relations. Gaddis fails to mention this. Indeed, none of the personality-based studies of either Eisenhower or Dulles take into account the effects of destalinisation on U.S. foreign policy. I remedy such shortcomings by including the ramifications of personality.

⁸⁰ Hoopes, *Devil and Dulles*, 162, 171; Some of the most interesting scholarship on Eisenhower and Dulles' personalities is based upon their religious views. See: Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy*, 229-287; The newest and perhaps best account is: Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 386-462.

⁸¹ John Lewis Gaddis, "The Unexpected John Foster Dulles: Nuclear Weapons, Communism and the Russians," in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 66-67.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 68-70.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 76.

This thesis supports the idea that Dulles was often doctrinaire himself, and given to universalism and rigidity in his views. It took years of change in the USSR and numerous overtures from the Soviets for Dulles to augmenting his perception of them. As mentioned, the domestic political situation and relations with allies were key reasons for him not to question his viewpoint. However, contrary to the claims of orthodox historians, Dulles did change his views by 1956, but kept them private. A canny political operator, he knew he needed to keep his changed view of destalinisation and the Soviets in general between himself and Eisenhower until it was safe to express such opinions in public. I contend he never expressed them fully before his death for this reason.

Therefore, Dulles could have developed a new perception of the Soviets even earlier whilst the domestic political situation was unfavourable and Western European security was being worked out, but kept his views private. Yet there is no evidence of this. Rather, it is not until April 1956 that the first indisputable evidence of a new perception is found. This thesis concludes that it was not such aforementioned reasons, but rather the massive implications the 20th Party Congress, that tipped the balance and changed his perceptions.

Conclusion

There is no shortage of literature dealing with the Cold War and the Eisenhower administration. But only a small amount of writings address destalinisation. Even when destalinisation is considered there is no systematic analysis into its significance for U.S. foreign policy and U.S.-USSR relations. This thesis remedies that gap. It addresses the effects on U.S. perceptions of the USSR, how Stalin's death and destalinisation were understood and how this affected perceptions of Soviet Communism.

The administration initially failed to understand the importance of Stalin's death and the subsequent effect on Soviet policy and decision-making that can be defined as 'destalinisation.' This was due primarily to a Cold War mindset of the Soviets constructed under Stalin. The role of the administration's perceptions of the Soviet system, and the new leadership, is key to understanding the period. Perception has been addressed in general international relations theory. This thesis innovatively demonstrates how perception played a critical role in both

delaying change, the role it played when they eventually did change. The cumulative effects of these changed perceptions are important to greater Cold War history since they allowed détente in the mid-1960s and are illuminative of the way the U.S. reacted to the Soviet transition of leadership in the early 1980s.

The resilience of U.S. perceptions of the USSR caused policy towards the USSR to be resistant to change. Yet other issues were of relevance in policymaking with regard to destalinisation. The domestic political situation in the U.S. changed significantly between 1953-56. The thesis seeks to take this into consideration as it can help explain why the administration was reticent to accept the reality of change in the USSR in 1953-54, but by 1956, was more receptive to the effects of the change in the Soviet system. The decline of the anti-communist fervour that characterised the early administration, and the awareness of Dulles to it had some bearing on the increased receptivity of the second Eisenhower administration to the changes in the USSR. Many books have been written addressing the effects of politics on the foreign policy of the administration. But none have taken into consideration the effect destalinisation had on domestic politics, nor the role domestic politics played in preventing U.S. foreign policy changes as a result of destalinisation.

The role of allies is assessed, especially in regard to the formulation of further alliances such as the EDC and NATO, since the motivation for these was a perception of fear towards the USSR. Since these perceptions were subject to change as a result of destalinisation, they must be re-examined. This study will complement existing works by considering the changes in the Soviet system that had enormous effects on the Cold War and American foreign policy.

The role of intelligence was important in the formation of, and maintenance of perceptions. However, as a closed society, reliable information about the USSR was difficult to obtain. As a result, correspondents and diplomats were especially important in this regard. Their contribution is examined. This allows the perceptions and insights of those 'on the ground' to be compared to those in Washington. This in turn can indicate why perceptions changed, and what was the root cause.

Furthermore, the administration continuously assessed the opinions expressed in the media. The thesis takes this into account in determining if it

altered perceptions, or retarded change even in light of a changed international atmosphere.

However, the driving force the change of heart towards destalinisation and the Soviets in general was a change in perception. I combine the above factors with this conclusion to offer a new synthesis of how U.S. perceptions of destalinisation changed over the course of the first Eisenhower administration. Rather than take existing scholarship at face value I have combined the existing narratives, many of which are decades old, with new resources to illustrate that perceptions of the Soviets began to change earlier than thought, even from an extremely hostile beginning.

Chapter 1: Stalin's Death and the Change in Soviet Leadership

As Stalin died Western leaders debated how the Soviet leadership transfer would proceed and what this would mean for the West. How would the Soviet Union continue without Stalin, the icon of world communism? Once it became apparent that one of Stalin's lieutenants would not simply continue in his footsteps, a flurry of speculation, analysis and argument ensued, not just about the transfer of power, but also about the significance of the changes following Stalin's death. The U.S., and the West in general, had to rapidly develop an understanding of what the new Soviet leaders represented, who the most important members of the leadership were, and what Soviet objectives would be in the post-Stalin era. The rapidity of the change from Stalinism to what became known as a 'soft' line, or 'new course' in Soviet foreign (and domestic) policy highlighted by the peace moves of the nascent Soviet regime was crucial in the formation of the perceptions of the U.S. leadership.

This change in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy was part and parcel of the process of destalinisation. The Eisenhower administration initially rejected the changes in the USSR as mere fig leaves designed to divide and confuse the West into letting down its guard. In this regard, many of the Western assessments of the new Soviet policies were correct. They *were* meant to make Western unity more difficult to maintain. But to dwell on the 'success' of the Western assessments would be to miss the larger consequence of the new Soviet course: the attitude of the Soviet leaders towards the West and their vision of the Cold War had changed significantly. Yet the Western position in general, and that of the U.S. in particular, could not keep pace with such changes due to the engrained perception of the USSR as irredeemably hostile. As a result, the majority of the Western governments did not yet appreciate these changes.

In time, elements within the U.S. administration began to question the validity of such assumptions. As spring led to summer in 1953, certain key figures began to assert, with more and more conviction, the gravity of the changes underway in the USSR. This dissent from the conventional wisdom of what can be termed the 'no basic change'-view of the USSR did not have an initial impact upon either Dulles or Eisenhower.

This chapter charts the evolution of U.S. and Western perceptions of the origins of destalinisation by examining two intertwined issues. Firstly, the understanding of the leadership change and the possibility of an overt power struggle is analysed. The response to the initial perceived 'ascent' of Malenkov, his subsequent 'demotion', and the fall of Beria are examined. Secondly, the chapter discusses the departures of the new Soviet leaders from Stalinist doctrine in foreign policy with particular emphasis on the 'peace offensive' and new 'soft line' in Soviet foreign policy.

In all of these sections the emphasis is on U.S. reactions and perceptions. The inclusion of evidence of the position of U.S. allies offers another angle with which to scrutinise the evolving U.S. mindset towards the changes in the USSR. This illustrates that while there were interesting subtle differences in interpretation of the Soviet changes, much more united the West in its reactions to the origins of destalinisation in 1953 than divided them.

Perceptions of the Transfer of Power through 1953

The Initial Reshuffle

Eisenhower valued intelligence. Reflecting his long career as a staff officer, he sought to surround himself with all information available before he came to a decision. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Stalin was not yet dead when the Eisenhower administration began gathering intelligence and formulating assessments of the situation. By 4 March the State Department had issued an intelligence estimate describing reports that some of the Soviet leaders held 'divergent' opinions about relations with the West. The State Department presumed that these divisions would not become apparent until one of the Soviet leaders achieved supremacy.¹ This, in effect, created an ironic corollary to the consequences of McCarthyism in the U.S. at the time; the new leaderships of both nations felt their range of actions constrained by the possibility of charges of political heresy.

The task for analysts was to determine what structure would emerge. In the weeks following Stalin's death, two lines of thought were apparent. One theory assumed that a singular leader would emerge from the ruling group. The

¹ StateDept Intelligence Estimate, March 4, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1090.

State Department Office of Intelligence Research (OIR) asserted that Malenkov was the logical choice to lead the USSR after Stalin.² The idea of Malenkov emerging as a 'new Stalin' was supported by the fact that he held both the positions of Chairman of the Council of Ministers and led the Party Secretariat of the CPSU. Most tellingly to U.S. observers was the treatment of Malenkov in the Soviet press: Malenkov was consistently praised in *Pravda* in the same manner Stalin had been.³

Alternatively, Allen Dulles told the NSC that while a Malenkov dictatorship was a possibility, committee rule was more likely in the circumstances with Malenkov as titular head. Soviet foreign policy, Dulles concluded, would remain as it was. CIA Special Estimate 39 (SE-39) determined that despite the change in leadership, there would be no change in Soviet hostility or the Kremlin's ultimate objectives.⁴ Eisenhower recalled the debate between those who felt the new regime was a "one-man Malenkov dictatorship" or a committee and that the "intelligence experts" were inclined to support the committee hypothesis.⁵

Despite the evidence that Malenkov was in a position of prominence, neither of the theories about the Kremlin power transfer held the absolute

² "IR-6226," March 9, 1953, RG59, BIR, OSEEA, Box 16, NARA. The task of the OIR (also referred to as the Bureau of Intelligence Research) was to analyse developments in international politics that could affect U.S. foreign policy. The papers produced as a result of their research are among the most reluctant to see any change in the USSR. There could be three reasons for this: Firstly, a simple desire to be prudent due to the changing situation; secondly, a fear of appearing 'soft' towards the USSR due to the prevalent atmosphere of fear in the State Department at this time as a result of the allegations of Senator McCarthy and Dulles' subsequent demand for 'positive loyalty'. This could have resulted in not only prudent assessments, but also in a tendency to tell Dulles what he wanted to hear. Thirdly, it could have been due to the rigidity of the perceptions of the Soviets that caused a tendency to discount information contradictory to established perceptions.

³ "IR-6252," March 30, 1953, RG59, BIR, OSEEA, Box 16, NARA; Beam to DeptState, March 20, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1137.

⁴ "Memo: 136th NSC Meeting," March 11, 1953, AWF, NSCS, Box 4, DDEL; "SE-39," March 10, 1953, WHOF, NSC Staff Papers 1948-61, Disaster File, Box 51, Eastern Europe (2), DDEL; National Intelligence Estimates repeatedly asserted that the changes in the USSR did not indicate any deviation from ultimate Soviet objectives, or any reduction in the basic hostility of the Soviets to the West. Raymond Garthoff writes that SE-39 was a "good initial assessment" of the situation in the USSR. In light of the assertion in SE-39 that Soviet policy would not change, it is hard to see how this was a good assessment. See: Raymond Garthoff, *Assessing the Adversary: Estimates by the Eisenhower Administration of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991), 5-6.

⁵ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 148-149; The intelligence experts Eisenhower referred to were those in the CIA. Eisenhower had a predilection for intelligence, and under his administration the CIA experienced its "golden years" of prestige and growth. Garthoff, *Assessing the Adversary: Estimates by the Eisenhower Administration of Soviet Intentions and Capabilities*, 3.

confidence of anyone in the administration. Due to the secretive nature of the Kremlin, the State Department and CIA could only base their assessments on the limited intelligence available, resulting in the necessarily vague conclusion that the power struggle was ongoing. This did not mean that the current Kremlin hierarchy was actually engaged in a power struggle; merely that something could develop in the future.⁶ In the absence of good intelligence, perceptions filled the void.

Some in the State Department attempted to gain further insights into the developments. The chargé in Moscow, Jacob Beam, risked contacting George Kennan (who was at the time deep in the political wilderness) to get his soundings on the situation. Kennan advised, "[t] here is simply no orderly way of transferring power in Russia. That doesn't mean the transfer can't be solved, but it will be solved the dangerous way..."⁷ Kennan's reply underlined the existing belief in the State Department that the USSR was a totalitarian state, and therefore rigid and incapable of moderate change. It also heightened hopes of an overt power struggle.

Kennan's reply, however, had a mixed effect on Beam. The following week he cabled to Washington that the emphasis in the Kremlin seemed to be on collective leadership, albeit with Malenkov and Beria as the real sources of power. Significantly, Beam stressed to the State Department that "...freed from Stalin's oppressive presence..." the new leaders were operating along much different lines.⁸ This was the first indication of U.S. awareness of the possible significance of the change underway in the Kremlin. At this point, however, the intelligence about the situation in the Kremlin was scarce.⁹ In the absence of reliable information about the inclinations of the Kremlin leaders, the mindset of U.S. policymakers led them to reject any indications of change.

Malenkov's 'Demotion'

When the news reached Washington that Malenkov had stood down from the chairmanship of the CPSU on 14 March, the White House immediately

⁶ "'Malenkov Cover', Beal to Caturani," March 13, 1953, TCD, Reel 137, HL.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Beam to DeptState, March 18, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1131-1132.

⁹ The nature of US, and indeed western, perceptions of the nature of the Soviet leadership are discussed in following chapters.

recognised the significance, noting that never before had the position of General Secretary been held by someone other than the head of state. Khrushchev's replacement of Malenkov was seen as a remarkable change in the Kremlin power structure, and Khrushchev was noted as someone who could now take the 'top spot'.¹⁰ The State Department also thought that the Kremlin was unstable due to the Malenkov demotion. It felt that such an action was indicative of a power struggle.¹¹ The greatest effect of Malenkov's demotion on the perceptions of the power structure in the Kremlin was to underline the belief of many in the administration that there was a latent power struggle. At the very least it led the administration to question the prudence of basing any policies on the emergence of any one leader until the situation in the Kremlin had stabilised.

After Malenkov's removal from the Party Secretariat, the State Department quickly detected the changed tone of the Soviet press towards 'collective leadership'.¹² With hindsight, it is easy to link Malenkov's removal from the Secretariat to his ultimate downfall in 1955. But such a clear connection was hardly the case. The removal of Malenkov did not cause the U.S., or other Western powers, to conclude that he was a political has-been. In fact, the analysis of Malenkov's significance continued through 1954. As a result of the changes in the Kremlin, the State Department and White House, and many Western allies were completely in the dark about the power structure in the Kremlin.¹³ The U.S., unable to comprehend the murky way in which power was exercised in the USSR, did not come to the conclusion that hindsight now grants; that the Party was the locus of power.¹⁴

Despite his removal from the Party Secretariat, the assumption in the U.S. was that Malenkov remained in charge. The NSC met on 8 April to discuss the demotion of Malenkov and the numerous reversals in Soviet policies since Stalin's death. It reached few conclusions in light the recent fantastic Soviet policy

¹⁰ "Draft Guidance on Withdrawal of Malenkov...", March 21, 1953, WHCF, Box 892, Official File 1953-61, Stalin's Death & Reactions...(1), DDEL.

¹¹ "'Malenkov Leaves Secretariat', Visson to Caturani," March 21, 1953, TCD, Reel 137, HL.

¹² "OIR Intelligence Brief," March 30, 1953, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 3, 1101(e) Malenkov, 1 of 2, NARA; "IR-6226."

¹³ For instance, see: "FO to Washington, Copied to Churchill," April 8, 1953, PREM 11/540, TNA; "British HC in Canada to CRO," March 26, 1953, DO 35/7048, TNA; "British HC in India to CRO," March 28, 1953, DO 35/7048, TNA.

¹⁴ "IR-6226."

turnarounds. It was clear to the NSC that the initial estimate that Stalin's policies would be continued was far from the mark. Beyond that the NSC could only conclude that the changes in the offing were the most monumental since 1939.¹⁵

The British simultaneously pondered the developments in the Kremlin. The Foreign Office told Churchill that the new soft line characterising Soviet foreign policy would make intra-Western relations more difficult than the "bludgeoning xenophobia" of Stalin. But it advised that the new attitude should not be dismissed.¹⁶ British Ambassador in Moscow Alvary Gascoigne advised Churchill that the situation could yet become more complicated; while Malenkov's removal from the party "...suggest[ed] a deliberate departure from Stalin's example" it did not imply that he had conceded control over the Party.¹⁷ The British opinion was essentially the same as the U.S., but with a greater willingness to accept the new Soviet attitude. This reflected the desire for lessening Cold War tensions among the British public, and Churchill's desire to play peacemaker.¹⁸

The U.S. was working under the assumption that power was either in the hands of Malenkov or a Malenkov-led committee, with much of the intelligence focused on Malenkov personally. The information reported to the State Department (some outright absurd) provides an indication of how little the West knew of the Soviet leaders.¹⁹ As such, the Office of Soviet Affairs and the OIR had to rely largely on Malenkov's public statements. One such compilation of his pronouncements spanned 33 pages for the 1929-1953 period. Using Malenkov's own words, the OIR painted him as irreconcilably hostile towards the West and an avowed Stalinist, thus confirming the existing belief held by U.S.

¹⁵ "NSC Memo," April 8, 1953, WHO-SANSA, 1952-61, NSC Subject Subseries, Box 5, Miscellaneous (1) (March-August 1953), DDEL. A theory from the embassy in Moscow was that the "old Bolsheviks" (Molotov, Khrushchev and Bulganin) were manoeuvring to take power, and the removal of Malenkov from the Party Secretariat, was the first step in this plan.

¹⁶ "FO to Washington, Copied to Churchill."

¹⁷ "'Soviet Union Quarterly Report', Gascoigne to Churchill," April 13, 1953, PREM 11/540, TNA.

¹⁸ Regarding Churchill, see: John W. Young, *Winston's Churchill's Last Campaign: Britain and the Cold War, 1951-5* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), chap. 6-7.

¹⁹ For example, in the frenzied search to provide the White House with intelligence on the new leaders following Stalin's death, the State Department requested clarification of whether or not Malenkov was Khrushchev's son-in-law, and if in fact his wife was fond of "severe mannish suits." "Information on Malenkov," March 1953, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 3, 1101(e) Malenkov, 1 of 2, NARA.

policymakers.²⁰ The selection was potent enough that anyone reading it who even considered the possibility that the Soviet changes in policy were sincere would have given serious pause. In light of the Soviet 'soft line' launched since Stalin's death, such intelligence would have undercut the position of anyone advocating dialogue with the Soviets on such a basis. Malenkov's conciliatory statements since Stalin's death, such as those highlighting the peaceful resolution of conflicts, would have been understood by the West as a mere change in tactics, due to the sheer volume of statements contradictory to these.²¹ Yet the point was never voiced that these statements, made as they were during Stalin's reign, may not have been the true feelings of the new leaders.

Hopes of a Power Struggle

By the end of April the consensus in the administration was that a committee ruled the USSR with Malenkov at its head. However, the long-term stability of this arrangement was open to interpretation. By July, some perceptions changed fundamentally.

Underlying much of the U.S. analysis of the situation was a hope that a power struggle would become openly manifested. The Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) asserted that committee rule was impossible in the Soviet system. The underlying assumption was that no matter how well planned and executed the power transfer was, it lacked longevity. The rapidity with which the new regime had established itself, the amnesty of prisoners in the USSR, goodwill measures abroad, the general new 'soft line' of Soviet foreign policy, and even Stalin's funeral were interpreted as signs of nervousness on the part of the new regime. According to the PSB, these actions could only be due to a desire for international tranquillity caused by internal concerns. This was interpreted as proof of a latent power struggle.²²

Others were less sanguine. Tracy Barnes, a high-ranking CIA operative, contacted CD Jackson, the president's Special Assistant for Psychological Warfare,

²⁰ "IR-6243," April 9, 1953, RG59, BIR, OSEEA, Box 16, NARA; "Quotations from the Public Statements of GM Malenkov," April 9, 1953, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 3, 1101(e) Malenkov 1942-1956, 1 of 2, NARA.

²² "PSB D-40: Plan for Psychological Exploitation of Stalin's Death," April 23, 1953, RG59, ExSec, PSB Working File 1951-53, Box 6, PSB D-40, NARA.

to express his misgivings. Barnes criticized the optimism over a power struggle. He thought it wishful thinking that resulted from the western desire for an end to the Cold War. Such optimism found support in the conclusions of Kennan (himself a CIA consultant) who predicted a power struggle, as well as in the more general conclusion that totalitarian systems bore the seeds of their own destruction. But for Barnes, there were simply too many assumptions involved in such a scenario for it to be the basis of national security policy. In light of the 'peace moves' from the Kremlin, such optimistic assumptions were dangerous. Barnes concluded it best for the administration to assume that the new soft line of the Kremlin was a tactical change to gain breathing space.²³ Indeed, CIA SE-46 concluded that while a power struggle could cause a retraction in Soviet power, it was difficult to predict with any accuracy. Furthermore, the CIA highlighted that the failure of Stalin's death to erode any bases of economic or military power made this unlikely.²⁴ U.S. Ambassador in Moscow Charles Bohlen echoed these conclusions. He reported that a change from collective leadership back to a Stalinist system was unlikely, as it would place tremendous strains on Soviet society.²⁵ So far, those optimistic for an overt power struggle had been disappointed. The western tradition of scrutinizing the May Day parade confirmed (as far as such speculation could) that the Kremlin power structure remained the same as it had been since March.²⁶ By early July however, the CIA had noticed signs of change in Moscow. Beria had not been seen in public with the other leaders in some weeks.²⁷

The Confusion over Beria

The public announcement on 10 July of Beria's arrest attracted intense scrutiny. Eisenhower met with his Cabinet that morning to consider the situation.

²³ "Barnes to Jackson," April 30, 1953, WHCF, CF, 1953-61, Box 65, Russia-Stalin's Death and Reaction...(2), DDEL; Barnes was a high ranking CIA official with close personal ties to Allen Dulles. He would later play critical roles in the 1954 Guatemalan Coup and the Bay of Pigs Invasion. See: Richard Immerman, *The CIA in Guatemala* (Austin, 1982), 139-140.

²⁴ CIA Special Estimate 46, July 8, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1201; The British were thinking along the same lines: Gascoigne told Churchill that there was no evidence of a split among the leaders. "Gascoigne to FO, PM," April 22, 1953, PREM 11/540, TNA.

²⁵ Bohlen to DeptState, July 7, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1195.

²⁶ "IR-5550.105," May 11, 1953, RG59 BIR, DevSigProp, Box 2, NARA.

²⁷ "Memo: 153rd NSC Meeting," July 9, 1953, AWF, NSCS, Box 4, DDEL.

Allen Dulles emphasized that while the purge of Beria was likely Malenkov's doing, it did not necessarily mean he had fully consolidated power.²⁸ CD Jackson agreed. But Foster Dulles rejected the views of the CIA and CD Jackson. He predicted that the removal of Beria would mean an end to the softer Soviet line and a return to Stalinist policies. In a phone call to his brother he quoted at length from *Problems of Leninism* to support his point.²⁹

Bohlen was recalled to Washington to advise on the matter at the tripartite meeting of the British and French Foreign Ministers the following day.³⁰ Over cocktails at Dulles' home, the Secretary once again relied on *Problems of Leninism* and quoted from passages regarding the seizure of power. Bohlen responded that communist doctrine had little relevance to Soviet actions. Foster Dulles remained convinced of their validity.³¹

At the Foreign Ministers meeting, Dulles raised the Beria issue with British representative Lord Salisbury and French Foreign Minister Georges Bidault. He insisted that the West could be witnessing the end of the Soviet 'soft line' and a return to Stalinism. He quickly qualified his argument though, by stating that there "...does not appear to be any personality comparable to Stalin..." who could carry out such a reversal.³² Given the vehemence with which Dulles made his argument against a reversal in Soviet policy, such a qualification was in stark contrast. Yet he concluded that the situation in the Kremlin proved that the Western policies of NATO and the EDC were working, and should be "...pursued with increased vigor."³³ Dulles was attuned to the idea that "dictatorships inspire doubts about motives, democracies inspire doubts about resolve."³⁴ Consequently, he was determined to maintain the western course of rearmament and integration in order to underline western resolve while concurrently protecting the west from what he thought were the devious intentions of the Soviet new course. While

²⁸ Editorial Note 603, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1206.

²⁹ TeleCon: SecState and DCI, July 10, 1953, *ibid.*, 1208-1209.

³⁰ Nixon suggested to Foster Dulles that the White House plant a number of stories that Bohlen had actually predicted Beria's demise in order to head off any criticism of his appointment. Dulles indicated that the State Department was already in the process of doing so, but for the White House to go ahead as well. *Ibid.*, 1209.

³¹ Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, 355-356.

³² McBride Minutes (of Bermuda Conference), July 11, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 5* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1983), 1609-10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 1610; "Gascoigne to FO," July 11, 1953, PREM 11/540, TNA.

³⁴ Larson, *Mistrust*, 17.

Salisbury and Bidault largely agreed with Dulles' stance, Salisbury expressed that the West nevertheless should remain flexible in its dealings with the Soviets.³⁵

While Salisbury was meeting with Dulles in Washington, many in Downing Street and the Foreign Office saw Malenkov's star rising, but did not interpret the fall of Beria as indicating a reversal in Soviet foreign policy. There was little evidence that Beria was behind the new 'soft line' or any of the particular policies introduced since Stalin's death. Indeed, the Foreign Office advised Churchill that since Beria had been the head of the Soviet secret police, his purge might actually signal a liberalisation of the regime.³⁶

The differing predictions about the effects of Beria's downfall illustrated how a lack of intelligence could lead to various conclusions. In this instance since Beria's opinions, and the structure of the Kremlin hierarchy now that he was gone were unknown, the West could only guess at how Soviet policy would evolve.

Malenkov in Control?

What the ouster of Beria meant for the power structure was also unclear. Malenkov's prominence suffered as a result of his relinquishing his position in the Party Secretariat, but he still benefitted from more public adulation than any other member of the collective leadership. Therefore, the OIR deemed Malenkov in the best position to establish "absolutist control."³⁷ The British felt that Malenkov was the most powerful, but that a collective leadership was ultimately in charge; there was little appetite for the idea that a dictator, or Stalinism, would return.³⁸

Though there was little current intelligence the OIR nevertheless noted a number of historical points that supported a 'Stalinist' interpretation of Malenkov. His involvement with the Cominform, and organisation perceived by the west as shadowy and conspiratorial was one example. Another was that Malenkov was the only leader, other than Stalin, that had worked in all government and Party institutions simultaneously. His close association with Stalin would have given

³⁵ McBride Minutes (of Bermuda Conference), July 11, 1953, Slany, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 5*, 1612-1613.

³⁶ Gascoigne to Mason, July 12, 1953, FO 371/106518, TNA; "FO to Colville (Churchill's Private Sec.)," August 7, 1953, PREM 11/540, TNA.

³⁷ "IR-6242," August 6, 1953, RG59, BIR, OSEEA, DevSigProp, Box 3, 1101(e) Malenkov 1942-1956, 2 of 2, NARA.

³⁸ "Gascoigne to FO"; Gascoigne to Mason, July 12, 1953.

him the knowledge of how to set up his own dictatorship. Thus the OIR concluded that Malenkov was:

...a product of Stalinist Russia, he has displayed complete devotion to the teachings of the dead dictator. Malenkov shares the basic antipathy of Stalin toward the West, and his thinking is apparently just as doctrinaire.³⁹

Thus he was potentially a 'new' Stalin. By the end of August, Western views were coalescing around the belief that Malenkov was the true leader of the USSR, or at the very least, *primus inter pares*.⁴⁰

No sooner was Malenkov's position at the top of the Kremlin hierarchy confirmed than concerns were raised in Whitehall about the rise of Khrushchev. The Beria purge reverberated at the highest levels and the British enquired what affect it had on the placement of Khrushchev in the leadership. The new emphasis on the general welfare of the Soviet people was understood as part of the reason for Khrushchev's rise due to his recognition as an agricultural expert. The British found it easier to explain Khrushchev's increased visibility through the fact that since March he had been First Secretary of the Party.⁴¹ But U.S. and British intelligence still suffered from a lack of information. When the NSC met on 17 September, Allen Dulles could only report that Khrushchev was "...Number Three in the government, and Number Two in the Party..." but that Khrushchev "...did not appear likely to aspire to the top position, as did Beria."⁴² By November, State Department sources were informing *Time* correspondents that Khrushchev was second in the Kremlin hierarchy.⁴³

The evolution of Western perceptions of the Soviet leadership structure through 1953 illustrated that while the U.S., and the West in general, were reasonably attuned to the changes in the Kremlin hierarchy, their understanding

³⁹ "IR-6242."

⁴⁰ Deputy Director and Chairman of the PSB respectively, George Morgan and CD Jackson remained optimistic of a power struggle in the Kremlin. See: "Morgan to Chairman of PSB (Jackson)," August 7, 1953, RG59, ExSec, SB Working File 1951-53, Box 6, PSB D-40, NARA. However, the hope for an open clash among Kremlin leaders was in decline among most by August; "Watson to Thurston," August 25, 1953, RG59, BIR, OSEEA, RRLDP, Box 3, 1101(e) Malenkov 1942-1956, 2 of 2, NARA; Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, August 10, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1210.

⁴¹ "Memo: Colville to Shuckberg," August 6, 1953, FO 371/106518, TNA; Shuckberg to Colville, August 15, 1953, FO 371/106518, TNA; "IR-5550.120," August 24, 1953, RG59, BIR, DevSigProp. Box 2, IR-5550.112-.125, NARA.

⁴² "Memo: 162nd NSC Meeting," October 1, 1953, AWF, NSCS, Box 4, DDEL.

⁴³ "Khrushchev Cover III', Beal to Gruin," November 14, 1953, TCD, Reel 148, HL. This is according to an "informed source". Interactions between *Time* correspondents and State Department staff were frequent; correspondents were a source of intelligence and the State Department provided useful leaks for headlines.

of the policy changes that were concurrent to these were less perceptive. It is of note that although the changes in the hierarchy were interwoven with the changes in policy, as Beria's purge illustrated, the reactions and perceptions of the West were more 'objective' towards the leadership changes than they were to changes in policy. As the transition to a more 'peaceful' foreign policy on the part of the Soviets was the driving force behind the modification of Western understanding of the Soviets, appreciation of the significance of the changes varied considerably, and was underpinned by deeply held convictions. But the seemingly objective view of the leadership struggle would become more and more polarised as it became clear that it held important implications for the U.S.

"a series of cheap gifts", "talk of conversations", or "something that cannot be dismissed": Reactions to the Soviet New Course

*The Soviet 'Peace Initiative'*⁴⁵

The changes in Soviet foreign policy after Stalin's death were groundbreaking in their rapidity and frequency. But the most prominent of these actions, the 'peace offensive', was based on Stalin's actions, and this led to a great deal of scepticism. Due to the experiences of the West in the Cold War thus far, as well as domestic imperatives in the case of the U.S., the safest option was to be wary of Soviet proclamations of peaceful intentions. Indeed, the West was acutely aware that a few easily reversible actions did not prove the sincerity of the Soviet leaders.⁴⁶ The U.S. proclaimed its willingness to entertain the Soviet peace moves while their sincerity was ascertained. Yet this was simply public cover for the deeply held conviction that the nature of the Soviet peace moves launched since Stalin's death represented a change in Soviet tactics at best, and a cunning trap at

⁴⁴ "Gascoigne to FO"; "Grey to Salisbury," August 24, 1953, PREM 11/540, TNA; Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, July 7, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1193. Paul Grey was Minister at the British Embassy in Moscow. He subsequently became British Ambassador to Switzerland.

⁴⁵ The terms 'peace initiative', 'peace offensive', 'peace moves' are used interchangeably to describe the Soviet emphasis on peaceful relations and 'peace' more generally in Soviet foreign relations during this period.

⁴⁶ Larson, *Mistrust*, 23, 33. Larson thoroughly analyses this psychological element in international relations, pointing out that not just talk, but even actions are "cheap" unless they are of a concrete and irreversible nature. In order to reverse the negative perception of the USSR held by the West, the Soviet leaders would have to consistently make such gestures. At this point in 1953, there were not yet enough concrete actions to reverse this perception. Complicating matters was the fact that different actors in Western governments had different "thresholds" to be met before they would admit change in the USSR. By July 1953, for example, Bohlen's threshold was met, but it would take Dulles much longer.

worst. In time, a minority within the U.S. administration began to feel that real change was afoot in the conduct of Soviet foreign policy. This, in combination with the changes in the leadership and origins of what became known as destalinisation, could not be dismissed outright.

At a special meeting of the NSC on 31 March Foster Dulles emphasised that the U.S. must win the Cold War through inducing the disintegration of the USSR. He thought the peace initiative was an acute danger to the U.S. that was designed to relieve pressure on the nascent Soviet regime. Dulles insisted the U.S. not be deceived and must maintain its policies towards the USSR. Eisenhower voiced his unequivocal agreement with the assessment.⁴⁷ This highlighted the change in outlook that Eisenhower undertook between 1945-53. In 1946, he had dismissed the idea that the Soviets were bent on conquest. By 1947 he expressed the opinion that the Soviets were "definitely out to communize the world."⁴⁸ Combined with a hostile domestic situation, he could hardly be seen to be 'falling' for what the Republican right deemed a 'communist trap.'

Yet Eisenhower expressed some optimism that the Soviet moves may amount to something. In a press conference in early April he claimed that the U.S. should take them at "face value" until there was reason not to. The West should not, however, ignore past actions of the Soviets in so doing.⁴⁹ Eisenhower's somewhat Janus-faced approach to the question can be explained by a desire not to come across as a warmonger through impeding the course of peace- something Soviet sponsored peace movements were already successful in associating the U.S. with.

The State Department view of the peace offensive was one of disbelief. It represented a "diabolically clever" plan that would get Western leaders to ponder if "maybe these new fellows really are different from Stalin, maybe they do want

⁴⁷"Memo: NSC Special Meeting," March 31, 1953, AWF, NSCS, Box 4, DDEL; This meeting is a prime example of the high level information leaked to Time correspondents, who by 3 April had a complete account of the discussion regarding the peace initiative. See: "'Peace Offensive Take Two', Bookman to Beshoar," April 3, 1953, TCD, Reel 138, HL; "'Peace Offensive Take Three', Beal to Beshoar," April 3, 1953, TCD, Reel 138, HL.

⁴⁸ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 226-227, 233.

⁴⁹ "Press Conference Transcript," April 2, 1953, RoP, WHCF, CF, 1953-61, Box 65, Russia-Stalin's Death and Reaction...(2) Annex, DDEL.

a *modus vivendi*”.⁵⁰ Dulles' was adamant that the West should not let up pressure on the Soviets, declaring “[t]his is the time when we ought to be *doubling* our bets... to *crowd* the enemy, and maybe *finish* him, once and for all.”⁵¹

The CIA was less enthused about taking action after the spectacular intelligence failure of SE-39. Yet according to Allen Dulles, the changes in tactics were in fact greater than any since 1939. He also thought the peace offensive was meant to gain ‘breathing space’ by undermining the creation of the EDC and Western cohesion generally in order to allow while the new regime to consolidate its authority.⁵²

Consequently, the peace offensive was treated seriously. The CIA, in conjunction with the State Department, Army, Navy, Air Force, and Joint Chiefs, conducted Special Estimate 42 (SE-42) in order “[t]o estimate the significance of current Communist ‘peace’ tactics.” A report of the findings and the State Department position was sent to all U.S. diplomatic posts and bore the clear influence of Foster Dulles. It reached the same conclusions as previous White House and State Department studies, stating that Soviet peace moves were simply aimed at “[t]he achievement of a ‘breathing spell’ by a tactical retreat [and this would] simply be an application of standard Marxist-Leninist doctrine.” Diplomats were encouraged to convey to audiences that “the Soviet gestures to date...give no assurance whatever of Soviet abandonment of long-range Communist objectives; they are instead all consistent with the standard Marxist doctrine of ‘tactical retreat’.” The West should not expect any change to Soviet strategic objectives since policy was determined “...not so much by individuals as by the totalitarian nature of the Soviet state structure and the doctrines of Communist ideology.”⁵³ The State Department asserted that it was the growing strength of the West through NATO, the EDC and increased European integration that was responsible for the Soviet conciliatory attitude. Surprisingly, the summary ended by declaring that the U.S. had not yet passed judgement on the Soviet peace moves. Such a claim though, was at best either a sop to Eisenhower's

⁵⁰ In this instance the source was future Undersecretary of State Douglas MacArthur Jr. “‘Peace Offensive Take Four’, Beal to Beshoar,” April 4, 1953, TCD, Reel 138, HL.

⁵¹ Quoted from: Gardner, “Poisoned Apples,” 87.

⁵² “Memo: 139th NSC Meeting,” April 8, 1953, AWF, NSCS, Box 4, DDEL.

⁵³ “The Soviet Peace Offensive,” April 22, 1953, RoP, WHCF, CF, 1953-61, Box 65, Russia-Stalin's Death and Reaction...(2), DDEL.

optimistic streak, or intended to negate any criticism from allies (in case of leaks) that the U.S. was taking a too close-minded or unreasonable line toward the new Soviet moves.⁵⁴ Subsequent statements by Dulles undermine his claimed objectivity towards the Soviet moves:

We must be constantly vigilant lest we fall into a trap...Soviet Communists have constantly taught and practiced the art of deception, of making concessions merely in order to lure others into a false sense of security, which makes them the easier victims of ultimate aggression.⁵⁵

Dulles' rejection of the peace offensive was also based on his cautious attitude towards domestic politics. In the political atmosphere of 1953, any hint of 'softness' towards communism could be political suicide. Attacks from not just McCarthyites, but from the right-wing of the Republican Party more generally, had the power to derail not only Dulles' career, but also the plans of the new Eisenhower administration. Republicans of the neo-isolationist persuasion sought a different approach to communism. They advocated an end to talks with the Soviets and sought to reinvigorate the Cold War. By the standards of these men, any negotiations with the Soviets had to be based on conditions that would ensure U.S. 'victory'. Anything less would be appeasement.⁵⁶ Whatever other motivations negotiations may have had, they certainly were propaganda vehicles.

Due to his history of cooperation with Democratic administrations, Dulles was hyper-vigilant of such voices in Congress. Compounding this, he had recently gone before the Senate to support the nomination of Bohlen as Ambassador to the USSR. Bohlen's acrimonious confirmation, held up by not only by his association with the Yalta Agreements but also by insinuations of homosexual infidelity illustrated the domestic atmosphere into which the Soviet peace offensive was launched. Though Dulles was reticent to defend Bohlen, he was also keen to prevent him from influencing policy in Washington, and thus making him Ambassador was a convenient solution.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Quoted from: John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment* (New York: OUP, 2005), 138-139.

⁵⁶ Norman Graebner, *America as a World Power: A Realist Appraisal from Wilson to Reagan* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1984), 190. In light of such demands, it is understandable how Malenkov would accuse the U.S. of a policy of diktat in his speech to the Supreme Soviet. Malenkov's rhetoric in turn would prevent more moderate men in the administration from seeing the change underway in the USSR.

⁵⁷ Dulles' fear of damage to his image as one of an anti-communist crusader was illustrated by his refusal to be photographed with Bohlen prior to his confirmation. A full account of the confirmation is in: Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, 309-336; Thomas G. Corti and T. Michael Ruddy, "The

McCarthyism aside, Dulles was acutely aware that Congress in general felt the peace offensive represented a change in Soviet *tactics*, not in overall strategy or objectives. This was exactly the position of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Senator William Fulbright specifically recognized the danger for the U.S. that the peace initiatives represented if European allies took them seriously.⁵⁸ Fulbright may have been reassured to know that the peace offensive was not having such an effect on European policymakers.

Indeed, the danger the peace offensive represented was a subject of broad agreement between the U.S. and Western European allies. The British, French, Belgians and West Germans broadly agreed that the Soviets thought the peace offensive could help stabilise the new regime, increase popularity at home, and divide the West. The British agreed with Dulles' assessment that many of the Soviet changes were the result of the power and unity of the West, including its atomic capabilities.⁵⁹ Similarly, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was concerned mostly with the effect the peace offensive could have on the Western public. He thought that ordinary Americans would be willing to take Soviet talk of *détente* at face value, when in fact it was only a "pipe-dream." The pressure of public opinion on Western governments could produce what Adenauer called a "bad situation." In combination with continued Soviet rearmament, such tactics were of considerable danger to the West.⁶⁰ Thus Adenauer, with his own unique political situation, came to a different view from his Western European counterparts, but one similar to Dulles.

So Much Change, So Much the Same

By mid-summer, perceptions of the Soviet new course began to change among a few key observers. However, key policymakers largely continued to

Bohlen-Thayer Dilemma: A Case Study in the Eisenhower Administration's Response to McCarthyism," *Mid-America* 72, no. 2 (1990): 121; Charles Bohlen, OH-136, interview by Don North, December 17, 1970, DDEL; Robert Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson provides an account from the Democratic perspective. Especially interesting to note is that Johnson marshalled more support among Democrats for Bohlen than Eisenhower could among Republicans. See: *Master of the Senate* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2002), 527.

⁵⁸ "'Communist Peace Offensive Take One', McHale to Beshoar," April 3, 1953, TCD, Reel 138, HL; "'Peace Offensive Take Four', Luce to Beshoar," April 3, 1953, TCD, Reel 138, HL.

⁵⁹ "Advance Memo on Foreign Ministers Meeting in Washington," July 3, 1953, CAB 129/61, TNA; "'The Red Peace Offensive', Visson to Caturani," April 3, 1953, TCD, Reel 138, HL; Rostow, *Europe after Stalin*, 50-51.

⁶⁰ Rostow, *Europe after Stalin*, 50-51.

reject the possibility that the changes were sincere. The most glaring example of the power of the changes being undertaken by the Kremlin was the East German Uprising in June. Allen Dulles briefed the NSC on the connection between the new Soviet 'soft policy' and the uprisings, noting the decreased harshness of Soviet policies both inside and outside the USSR. This change, claimed Dulles, had not gone unnoticed by the satellite populations, who saw this as a chance to improve their lot without taking the huge risks they would have under Stalin.⁶¹

But many in the administration were so confident that the new course was merely tactical that the U.S. missed the larger implication of the uprising on Cold War relations. The fact that the Soviets were willing to initiate changes that ran the risk of disintegrating the Bloc did not occur to the NSC. The Soviets were willing to essentially gamble over something as sacrosanct as the people's democracies, but this did not cause anyone in the administration to ask if they would be willing to change course vis-à-vis the West. CIA SE-46 laid out the same position as before the uprising, stating that the Kremlin's soft tactics were merely a challenge to the Western alliance and the presentation of a diminished Soviet threat could make allied unity more difficult and lead to Western European neutralism.⁶²

Beria's purge, however, *was* seen as something that could affect the new Soviet 'soft line', but only in a manner consistent with Western preconceptions of the new leaders as unrepentant Stalinists. At the Foreign Ministers meeting in July, Dulles told Lord Salisbury and Bidault that it could signal the return to a harsher, Stalinist style of foreign policy. Bidault and Salisbury agreed, though they both remained more open to the possibility than Dulles.⁶³ But the fundamental belief of all three men was that the Soviet actions were neither genuine, nor new. The Foreign Office briefed Churchill that the Soviet new course had its basis in Stalinism.⁶⁴ Soviet 'peace' doublespeak was common under Stalin and such use of 'peace' rhetoric served to cast doubts over the new Soviet peace moves. Malenkov's public utterances would have strengthened the disbelief of those who placed no credence in the Soviet changes. For example, Malenkov

⁶¹ "Memo: 150th NSC Meeting," June 18, 1953, AWF, NSCS, Box 4, DDEL.

⁶² SE-46, July 8, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1203.

⁶³ McBride Minutes (of Bermuda Conference), July 11, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 5*, 1609-1614.

⁶⁴ "FO to Colville (Churchill's Private Sec.)."

proclaimed in March 1950 that the Soviets "...shall tirelessly and most steadfastly continue to pursue a consistent policy of peace."⁶⁵ After years of such statements, concurrent with the Korean War, the turnaround in Soviet policy and rhetoric would have been hard to accept.

Current Soviet 'peace' proclamations further hardened the Western mindset. Ilya Ehrenberg, Soviet representative to the World Peace Council, stated publicly that 'peace' should be *defined* as Western European rejection of the EDC and withdrawal from NATO.⁶⁶ The furthest reaching example of Soviet rhetoric in this regard was Malenkov's speech to the Supreme Soviet in August. His sustained attack on U.S. policy damaged any possible acceptance of the new course by the U.S. Malenkov accused the U.S. of a policy of subversion and 'diklat' towards the USSR.⁶⁷ The general tone was the same as speeches given under Stalin. The U.S., therefore, understood it in the same Cold War mindset of Soviet hostility that had been developed under Stalin. Yet what the U.S. missed, but was pointed out by Gascoigne to the Foreign Office, were Malenkov's numerous firm statements that could not have been so easily uttered under Stalin:

There is no objective basis for clashes between the U.S. and USSR; there are no disputes or outstanding questions that cannot be settled peacefully by negotiation; the cause of the strengthening of peace...is not a question of tactics and diplomatic manoeuvre. It is our general line in the field of foreign policy.

Unbeknownst to the West, Malenkov wanted to reduce tensions- and in fact needed to do so in order to enact domestic reforms. The assessments of the West - that they were meant to gain breathing space - were correct. However, Malenkov could not convince the West of his sincerity. He was beholden to the Stalinist manner of thinking and speaking that was second nature to the Soviet leadership in 1953.⁶⁸ Those in the West who were hostile to the idea that the Soviets could be different from Stalin found their mindset validated by the fact that the new

⁶⁵ "Quotations from the Public Statements of GM Malenkov". Summaries of the public statements and speeches of Malenkov were prepared by the OIR and circulated through the State Department. Filled with statements proclaiming Soviet peaceful intentions that were subsequently understood to have been violated, such intelligence contributed to the Western disregard for the Soviet peace offensive.

⁶⁶ "IR-5550.111," May 11, 1953, RG59, BIR, OSEEA, DevSigProp, Box 2, NARA; The World Peace Council was commonly held to be a Soviet front organisation. The effect of such new information on established perceptions is examined extensively in: Larson, *Mistrust*.

⁶⁷ "Malenkov Speech to Supreme Soviet," August 8, 1953, PREM 11/540, TNA.

⁶⁸ Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 147-48.

leaders operated within such a Stalinist framework. In this regard, referring to the new leadership as 'children of Stalin' was in a sense correct. Continuing to express themselves in Stalinist discourse, Malenkov and the new leadership inadvertently negated any attempted improvement in their image, and through this, relations with the West.⁶⁹

Though the majority rejected the Soviet changes, Bohlen reached a turning point after the East German Uprising. He argued that it had never been a Soviet tactic to alter its power structure merely in order to confuse the West. The U.S. could:

...no longer without detriment to our purposes continue to dismiss the present phase of Soviet policy both internal and external as simply another "peace campaign" designed solely or even primarily to bemuse and divide the West.⁷⁰

Convinced that there was something more to the new course, Bohlen pointed out that although the Soviets would seek to undermine any hostile alliance, this was to be expected. Rather, the new course represented primarily an effort to reduce the risk of war. Most importantly for the development of the U.S. stance towards the changes underway in the USSR, Bohlen thought the development of a more 'liberal' regime was clearly underway. A requirement of this was:

...the skillful but nonetheless consistent destruction of the myth of Stalin's infallibility and his relegation as a junior member of the Communist Valhalla with obviously carefully considered selection of what part of his policies or programs can be retained and what discarded.⁷¹

Diplomatic actions to reverse the damage done by Stalin's policies were proceeding in Yugoslavia, Austria, Turkey and Korea. These were meant to pave the way for larger agreements. Such sensitive actions would not be taken if they were merely part of a tactical and reversible peace offensive. Most tellingly for Bohlen, the 'new course' was proceeding in the satellites, East Germany included, even in the aftermath of the June uprising. As Bohlen saw it, control over the satellites was too large a wager to place on a mere peace offensive.⁷²

Bohlen thought that the recent moves were unique; all Soviet peace gestures since 1945 could be exposed immediately as ploys. The current ones

⁶⁹ Brooks, "Stalin's Ghost," 115.

⁷⁰ Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, July 7, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1193.

⁷¹ Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, July 7, 1953, *ibid.*, 1195-1196.

⁷² Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, July 7, 1953, *ibid.*, 1195.

could not. They appeared to Bohlen to be genuine in many regards, specifically towards the resolution of the German and Austrian questions. While such efforts towards resolution of these issues would make maintenance of the Western alliance more difficult, that did not mean the sole reason for them was the undermining of the Western position.⁷³

Policy Planning Staffer Louis Halle also believed that the peace offensive was more than tactics. He told Director of the Policy Planning Staff Robert Bowie and Chargé at the Moscow embassy Jacob Beam that there was no danger in probing Soviet intentions. In fact he thought the danger lay in *not* approaching the Soviets. Halle predicted disunity among the Western allies if the U.S. ignored Soviet overtures while other nations investigated them.⁷⁴ Despite what Bohlen and Halle indicated, the U.S. and the West maintained the conviction that the peace offensive was only a tactical change. Confirming this assumption, the PSB issued a "Status Report on the National Psychological Effort" in late July which stated that the Soviet peace overtures had resulted in an increase in neutralism within the Western alliance, resulting in delays to the establishment of the EDC and further Western European integration.⁷⁵ This served to confirm the interpretation of Eisenhower, Dulles and the majority in the administration.

By the end of September, the White House still regarded the peace offensive as a ploy. In its review of Basic National Security Policy that became NSC 162/2, the NSC stated that Soviet strategy would remain flexible in its use of different tactics to undermine the West. It raised the possibility that the Soviets might want to resolve some issues, and stated the U.S. should remain open to the possibility of settlements with the USSR- so long as they were combatable with U.S. security interests. Nevertheless, the review concluded "[t]here is no evidence that the Soviet leadership is prepared to modify its basic attitudes and accept any permanent settlement with the United States".⁷⁶ Indeed the British were of the

⁷³ Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, July 9, 1953, *ibid.*, 1205-1206.

⁷⁴ "Memo: Halle to Bowie, Beam," July 27, 1953, RG59, PPS Files, 1947-53, Box 42, Sov Evolution & U.S. Policy, NARA; Melvyn Leffler briefly addresses Halle's contribution in: Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 118. However, Halle remained in contact, and provided advice to the PPS, Robert Bowie and Jacob Beam through 1956. These can be found in Halle's papers held in the special collections of the University of Virginia, and will be addressed in later chapters.

⁷⁵ "D-47: Status Report on the National Psychological Effort," July 29, 1953, PSB D-47, Box 6, PSB Working File, 1951-53, ExSec, RG59, NARA.

⁷⁶ NSC-162, September 30, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 2* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1984), 492-497.

same mindset with the Foreign Office characterising it as "...a series of cheap gifts."⁷⁷ What is most surprising though is that in the very document that establishes the "New Look" of the Eisenhower administration, there is no mention of taking advantage of reduced Soviet hostility in order to prepare the U.S. for the 'long haul' sort of struggle that Eisenhower and Dulles thought the Cold War would be.⁷⁸ Instead, the perception of the Soviets as irredeemably hostile held sway. To be sure, if the U.S. did take the opportunity to reduce defence expenditure, they would be falling for the ruse that the Soviet peace offensive represented.

At the Bermuda Conference in December, the White House had not changed its position, but the French and British positions had become more nuanced. Bidault explained that since the death of Stalin, all Western foreign ministries had agreed there was little substance to the changes in Soviet policy. The East German Uprising and the purge of Beria, combined with economic figures released by the Kremlin, pointed to a new course. The Kremlin, Bidault thought, needed a stable international situation in order to improve their domestic situation. Simultaneously the Soviets were attempting to split the West by dealing with each nation separately. He pointed out the 'battering up' the French received from the Soviets in an effort to split them from the U.S. and British positions.⁷⁹

Churchill largely agreed with Bidault, but stressed that there appeared to have been real changes since Stalin's death, while acknowledging these could be due to "...an ingenious variation in tactics." Nevertheless, Churchill thought the West should not dismiss the possibility of change too quickly, and should, while maintaining its guard, examine the 'new look' of the Soviets.⁸⁰ Eisenhower, however, slammed the door on such a possibility, emphasising that it was possible there were changes in the USSR, but it was much more likely that:

...under this dress was the same old girl, if we understood that despite bath, perfume or lace, it was still the same old girl...perhaps we could

⁷⁷ "Gascoigne to FO"; "Grey to Salisbury."

⁷⁸ Saki Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New-Look National Security Policy, 1953-61* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 2; For a comprehensive overview of fiscal affairs in the administration see: Iwan W. Morgan, *Eisenhower Versus "The Spenders": The Eisenhower Administration, the Democrats and the Budget, 1953-60* (London: Pinter, 1990).

⁷⁹ U.S.Delegation Minutes, December 4, 1953, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 5, 1755-1757.*

⁸⁰ U.S.Delegation Minutes, December 4, 1953, *ibid.*, 1758-1759.

pull the old girl off the main street and put her on a back alley.⁸¹

Chapter Conclusion

The NSC's conclusions in September and Eisenhower's utterances in Bermuda were ultimately indicative of the Eisenhower administration's fundamental understanding of the Cold War in 1953. On Veterans Day, Eisenhower proclaimed that "anyone who doesn't recognize that the great struggle of our time is an ideological one ...[is] not looking the question squarely in the face."⁸² If this were truly Eisenhower's belief, then as long as he saw no change in the fundamental ideology of the USSR, he would also reject the idea that the new leadership could be different from Stalin.

The West closely followed the change in leadership in the USSR. It was a perfect example, however, of the West seeing what it wanted to. Those at the top of their respective governments proceeded from the knee-jerk reaction that nothing of consequence would change in the USSR.⁸³ The underlying reasons for this were much the same as those for the rejection of the change in Soviet foreign policy. Yet Western allied governments remained more open minded about the changes in the Kremlin due to popular opinion, and in the British case, the desires of Churchill for a summit.

Just as the leadership change was approached from established anti-communist mindsets, the 'new course' in Soviet foreign policy, highlighted by the 'peace offensive', was similarly rejected by most as an example of Soviet tactics and duplicity. In his memoirs, Eisenhower wrote:

The new leadership in Russia, no matter how strong its links with the Stalin era, was not completely bound to blind obedience to the ways of a dead man...Consequently, a major preoccupation of my mind through most of 1953 was the development of approaches to the Soviet leaders that might be at least a start toward the birth of mutual trust founded on

⁸¹ U.S.Delegation Minutes, December 4, 1953, *ibid.*, 1761.

⁸² Eisenhower quoted in: Gaddis, *Strategies*, 136.

⁸³ The notable exception, of course, was Churchill. However, his views were not shared by his own ministers though, who did their best to prevent the Prime Minister from putting the UK in a precarious position between the U.S. and the USSR in his excitement to arrange a summit. John Young contrasts Churchill's attitudes towards Soviet Communism over time in "Churchill and East-West Detente," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 11 (2001): 373-92; Young thoroughly examines Churchill's failure to achieve a summit after Stalin's death in *Churchill's Last Campaign*; See also M. Steven Fish, "After Stalin's Death: The Anglo-American Debate Over a New Cold War," *Diplomatic History* 10, no. 4 (1986): 333-55; Klaus Larres, "Eisenhower and the First Forty Days After Stalin's Death: The Incompatibility of Détente and Political Warfare," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 6 (July 1995): 431-69; Stanke, "Stalin's Death and Anglo-American Visions of Ending the Cold War, 1953."

cooperative effort...⁸⁴

Yet throughout 1953 the policy of the administration was based upon the assumption that there was no evidence of change by the Soviet leadership. Despite the massive changes in the Kremlin since Stalin's death and their rapidity and frequency, the understanding of the new leaders as unreformed Stalinists was so deeply held that only a handful of policymakers in either the U.S. or other Western allies came to appreciate the unique nature of the changes in the USSR. The majority could not shake the belief, exemplified by Eisenhower and Dulles that the Soviet Communist creed was immovable.

Furthermore, the administration was unsure of Malenkov's position within the Kremlin hierarchy. His apparent demotion in March, so soon after he took the reigns of power, was quizzical. Khrushchev's rise from relative obscurity to become one of the most powerful men in the Kremlin made Eisenhower and Dulles still more unsure of who led the Soviets. The Kremlin was also, intentionally or not, sending mixed messages; any intended signals of 'peace' were undermined by the continued use of Stalinist rhetoric. Further compounding the issue was the lack of good intelligence on such matters. In such a situation it is unsurprising that the perceptions formed of the Soviet leaders over the previous years led the administration to maintain a course of doubt and hostility.

Despite Eisenhower's recollections the U.S. position remained one of unquestioned distain for the proclaimed Soviet changes. It is possible that Eisenhower was embellishing for posterity. However, it is more likely that he genuinely did desire to reduce tensions, but found that perceptions of Soviet intentions, both his own and those of his advisors, to be too firmly imprinted to allow such a chance to be taken. The experience of years of Stalinist foreign policy, and the rhetoric that accompanied it, prevented any credence being placed in the new Soviet line. Even if Eisenhower or others had been willing to give the Soviet new course the benefit of the doubt the domestic political atmosphere militated against this: The risk was simply too great in 1953. Furthermore, the foreign policy goals of the administration would be in jeopardy if it gambled on

⁸⁴ Eisenhower, *Mandate for Change*, 144.

softening relations with the USSR. The transatlantic security depended heavily at this time on the Soviet threat. In particular, Dulles would not risk the EDC.

Treated with outright rejection and hostile scepticism at first, the new leadership and change in foreign policy were eventually accepted as representing fundamental change in the USSR. But Western perceptions of the Soviets in 1953 made it too soon for most in the West to appreciate. It would not be until 1956 that there indisputable recognition of the changes that underpinned destalinisation.

Chapter 2: Divining the Power Structure and the Ascent of Khrushchev, 1954

The news that Beria had been executed on 23 December triggered another round of discussion as to the effects, if any, it would have on the Soviet hierarchy and policy. In the immediate aftermath OIR noted that a purge was a possibility, and that the purge confirmed the primacy of the Party.¹ The CIA had been following the development of the Beria situation closely, and in its tenth paper on the matter put forward an explanation that allowing Beria to re-establish control over the MVD/MGB was actually a way of giving Beria enough rope to hang himself since he would inevitably promote his lieutenants. This set Beria up for charges of an 'anti-Party' conspiracy.²

Indeed, Malenkov dominated the Soviet New Year celebrations. He responded to a series of questions submitted by American journalist Joseph Kingsbury Smith in a manner similar to that in which Stalin had responded to James Reston's questions only a year prior. The OIR immediately drew the conclusion that Malenkov was solidifying dictatorial control.³ In the absence of hard intelligence on Kremlin affairs, the media acted as source of indirect intelligence.

The Soviets were careful to operate behind a façade of "strict collectivity". Propaganda emphasised that the 200 members of the Central Committee made all decisions together. The CIA noted that Malenkov was most powerful, but also that Khrushchev was gaining influence. Khrushchev's prestige had surpassed Molotov's, and Soviet propaganda was careful to stress Malenkov and Khrushchev equally when discussing the new economic programme. Most importantly, Khrushchev had been First Secretary of the CPSU since August 1953. The CIA named this, along with his influence in personnel and agricultural

¹ "IR-5550.138," January 4, 1954, RG59, BIR, Developments Significant for Propaganda, Box 2, IR-5550.126-.140, NARA.

² "Current Intelligence Report, Purge of LP Beria," August 13, 1954, CREST, CIA-RDP91T01172R000200230001-5, NARA The CIA reported that, ironically, the first reported instance of Beria's absence was when the rest of the Presidium was attending a production of Tolstoy's *The Decembrists*.

³ "IR-5550.139," January 11, 1954, RG59, BIR, DevSigProp, Box 2, IR-5550.126-.140, NARA This would lead to a vociferous exchange of letters between Harvey and Bohlen in 1955 when Malenkov was pushed out. See chapter 3. I attempted for almost a year to locate the papers of Joseph Kingsbury Smith, contacting former employers and family members, but to no avail.

matters, as the source of his power. Although Khrushchev had long been an associate of Malenkov, the CIA thought a rivalry was developing.⁴

Yet there was also recognition of “continuity and stability” in the Kremlin: Dulles’ Special Assistant for Intelligence, Park Armstrong, informed him in March 1954 that the group of Soviet leaders was essentially the same since Stalin’s death. Beria’s death greatly enhanced the stability of the “collective” under Malenkov.⁵ That Armstrong recognised the apparent stability in the Kremlin, at least insofar as there was no blood flowing, would have disappointed the OIR. But Armstrong’s conclusion that there was apparent continuity in the leadership, directly from Stalin’s death to the present, served to reinforce the conclusions of Dulles and others that any policy changes thus far were tactical and that long term changes in Soviet posture and objectives would not be forthcoming. Allen Dulles confirmed Armstrong’s conclusions in April, stressing that the collective leadership seemed to be stable.⁶

But the U.S. was aware Khrushchev’s star was rising. Speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations, the political secretary at the U.S. embassy in Moscow Robert Tucker noted that Malenkov was likely to be superseded by Khrushchev, owing to the latter’s hold on the First Secretaryship.⁷ Tucker’s analysis was given further credence though *New York Times* journalist Harrison Salisbury, a close friend of Bohlen’s. Highlighting his role as an intelligence source, the Soviet censor approved a story Salisbury submitted that asserted Khrushchev was as powerful as Malenkov. Bohlen concluded that Khrushchev

⁴ “Current Intelligence Weekly,” January 15, 1954, CREST, CIA-RDP79-00927A000200080001-3, NARA.

⁵ Andrei Andreyev, who has been in decline before Stalin’s death, was the only other man gone from the top ranks. “Memo: Armstrong to SecState,” March 16, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 761.xx, LM178, Reel 7, NARA.

⁶ “Governor’s Briefing,” April 27, 1954, AWDP, Box 107, Folder 2, ML.

⁷ “Meeting Digest: Postwar Evolution of Soviet Policy,” Robert Tucker,” May 11, 1954, CFRR, Box 445, Folder 2, ML; Tucker had been involved with government-sponsored research on Russia since 1941. He would go on to have a long career in academia, developing studies of Stalin based on psychology, and a well-regarded Stalin biography. He would also focus on totalitarianism, rejecting the idea that Stalinism was the inevitable product of Lenin’s party structure, and supporting the idea that there was a clear change in regime from Lenin to Stalin. See: Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*, 16, 28, 219, 227–229; Robert C. Tucker, “Towards a Comparative Politics of Movement-Regimes,” *The American Political Science Review* 55, no. 2 (1961): 281–89; Robert C. Tucker, *Stalin as Revolutionary, 1879-1929* (New York: Norton, 1973); Robert C. Tucker, *The Soviet Political Mind: Stalinism and Post-Stalin Change* (New York: Praeger, 1963).

was at least powerful enough to see the story passed.⁸ Salisbury's contributions highlight that those who were present in Moscow frequently took a different view of the developments in the Kremlin than those in Washington. The relationship between journalists and diplomats in the Soviet Union was close, usually out of necessity. Salisbury's extensive contacts allowed him insights into the Kremlin that Bohlen could not have. It also highlighted that although Bohlen and Salisbury had different objectives, they came to very similar conclusions.

Bohlen also analysed the recent speeches given by Khrushchev and Malenkov. He concluded that Malenkov took a more sober view of the international situation.⁹ Bohlen was not alone in this conclusion. Edward Crankshaw, Soviet columnist for *The Observer*, echoed Bohlen's views. Crankshaw's analysis was a source of intelligence for the London embassy. Crankshaw asserted there was an open rift between Khrushchev and Malenkov. Malenkov touted peaceful coexistence line while Khrushchev expounded a "violently anti-Western" stance.¹⁰ But Bohlen noted there appeared to be differences among the leaders about the ability of the Soviet system to support numerous new domestic initiatives. Consequently, arguments ensued over which should receive priority. Bohlen noted that given the nature of the Soviet system "when differences on policy become sufficiently acute, a contest between rival factions with the eventual elimination of one or the other automatically ensues." But he was quick to contextualise this by stressing that the Soviet leaders were also especially aware of the dangers that an open power struggle would bring for the Soviet system as a whole, let alone for each other.¹¹

The State Department tracked Khrushchev's trajectory closely, aware that the pre-eminence one leader or another could have profound effects on U.S. foreign policy. In June, an OIR intelligence brief asserted that Khrushchev's power was growing. Most curiously, Salisbury submitted another story to the Soviet censor a story regarding the power of the Party Secretaryship. Initially

⁸ Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, May 27, 1954, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1234; All foreign journalists had to submit their stories for censorship at the Central Telegraph Office. See: Harrison Salisbury, *A Journey for Our Times* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983), 322-323, 366-368, 469-470; Harrison Salisbury, *Moscow Journal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961).

⁹ "Current Intelligence Bulletin," May 27, 1954, CREST, CIA-RDP79T00975A001600020001-1, NARA.

¹⁰ "Despatch: Chipman to DeptState," July 4, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 761.xx, LM178, Reel 12.

¹¹ "Current Intelligence Bulletin."

rejected, three days later it was mysteriously passed without deletions. Something like this could not have occurred, twice no less, if Malenkov held Stalinesque power. Yet the OIR asserted that Khrushchev and Malenkov seemed to be roughly on the same level. Due to the official adherence to collective leadership the OIR concluded that it was possible that Khrushchev's rise was a carefully planned mechanism to balance Malenkov's power, thus strengthening the principle of collective leadership.¹² The Moscow embassy agreed with OIR in terms of Khrushchev's apparent rise in power. Just as the OIR had doubts that Khrushchev was paramount, the embassy highlighted Malenkov's press visibility increased in June. The Soviet leaders stressed 'Collectivity' by listing themselves alphabetically. Khrushchev also travelled to Czechoslovakia, and Molotov to Geneva: absences of leaders did not indicate a simmering struggle for power.¹³

Such developments led Moscow embassy secretary Walter Walmsley to conclude that the leaders were in fact taking collective leadership seriously. If some sort of struggle were to ensue, it would be a result of policy differences, rather than a struggle for power per se.¹⁴ To be sure, the interpretation of what a power struggle would prove to be a point of contention between the OIR and the Moscow embassy over the coming year. Bohlen was troubled by the tendency of the OIR, and the State Department more generally, to interpret all Soviet political developments through the prism of a power struggle. He rejected the theory that one was currently developing.¹⁵ For the moment, there was a rough consensus about the likelihood of a power struggle, or at least its effects. In September 1954 the OIR concluded in a report on "Soviet capabilities and intentions" that the Soviet regime was firmly ensconced in power and would not be dislodged by either external forces or a leadership struggle. If a power struggle did break out, the Soviet leadership would deal with it inside the Kremlin, and any Western hope of a civil war was unlikely.¹⁶ By autumn the Kremlin seemed to be stable. Bohlen noted that many leaders were on foreign trips simultaneously.

¹² "OIR Intelligence Brief," June 14, 1954, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 1, Khrushchev, Nikita S., May 1947- Dec 1954, NARA.

¹³ "Despatch: Walmsley to DeptState," July 31, 1954, RG59, CDF, 1950-54, 761.xx, LM178, Reel 7, NARA.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Memo: Merchant to SecState, August 10, 1954, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1248.

¹⁶ "Soviet Capabilities and Intentions," September 8, 1954, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 14, Soviet Interests, etc., NARA.

This indicated that there was no serious tension that would give them pause before travelling.¹⁷ Allen Dulles reported that the “succession crisis has to date been surmounted with surprising ease”.¹⁸

The Military after Stalin, 1954

Although Eisenhower and Dulles primarily conceived of the Soviet threat in ideological terms, this ideology had teeth in the form of the Soviet military. In the aftermath of Stalin’s death there were reports that Malenkov would not be able to assume Stalin’s position of absolute power due to his position as a “party man” and his lack of influence with the Army. As a result, some in the administration thought a military coup was possible. Such reports were often wild exaggerations, but in the brief period of uncertainty about the leadership in the days after Stalin’s death they were momentarily considered in the State Department.¹⁹

Once the dust had settled and the power situation in the Kremlin became clearer through 1953 and into 1954 the increased prestige of the Soviet military under the collective leadership came under scrutiny. The visibility and possibly the budget of the Soviet military had increased, but the administration did not think it was a source of Kremlin tensions. Regardless, this did not decrease the perceived danger of the military. The State Department described as “a big laugh” the reduction in Soviet military spending that was announced in August 1953 since the reduction could have been easily hidden elsewhere in the Soviet budget. Even if there were genuine spending cuts, price reductions announced by the government in the spring would compensate for most of these. The State Department thought the real motivation was the positive propaganda effect it could have for the Soviet peace offensive.²⁰

According to the CIA the military had not traditionally played a role in internal political crises. Indeed, “the Soviet armed forces entered the post-Stalin period without a history of successful interference in internal political crises by

¹⁷ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState,” October 6, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 761.xx, LM178, Reel 8, NARA.

¹⁸ Paper Prepared by the DCI, November 18, 1954, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 2, 777*.

¹⁹ “Malenkov’, Kroon to Caturani,” March 14, 1953, TCD, Reel 137, HL.

²⁰ “Soviet Budget’, Beal to Gruin,” August 7, 1953, TCD, Reel 144, HL.

the military as a single, organized element of power.”²¹ Yet there was a consensus that the fortunes of the Soviet military had improved since Stalin’s death. Allen Dulles and Bohlen all agreed that it was playing a greater role in Soviet affairs. However, Bohlen agreed with the CIA analysis that the military was not playing an independent role in politics. Rather, the position of the military was more akin to its traditional role in Russian politics than anything else and its improved fortunes were due to the end of Stalin’s dictatorship than any actions of the new leaders.²²

The rising prestige of the Soviet military, and specifically the promotion of Zhukov gave rise to the idea that Eisenhower should use the friendship they developed through the Second World War to establish a backchannel to the Kremlin. Bohlen frowned upon this suggestion; it was fraught with risk. Zhukov had no official government position at this point. If Eisenhower were to contact him officially it would have been a breach of protocol. But if he were to write to Zhukov unofficially but still seeking, however modestly, to influence affairs or to improve U.S.-Soviet relations, the plan could still backfire. With the political tensions that so many in the administration thought were present inside the Kremlin, correspondence with the president could be construed as disloyalty. This was dangerous, not least for Zhukov. In addition, U.S. allies could be alarmed that the U.S. was establishing a channel of communication with the Kremlin without their knowledge; further undermining an alliance under strain due to the Soviet peace offensive.²³ The proposed correspondence, however innocent, could easily be used against the U.S.

Reading into Soviet Domestic Affairs: The Danger of Suggestion

The fortunes of the Soviet military were closely tied to the Soviet economy. Any changes in either could have a profound impact on U.S. policy. The administration thought continued emphasis on heavy industry meant a

²¹ “Memo: Politics and the Soviet Army,” March 12, 1954, CREST, CIA-RDP91T01172R000200220001-6, NARA The report downplays the importance of the Kronstadt Revolt, the one major instance of the military trying to influence politics during the Soviet period.

²² “Governor’s Briefing”; “Meeting Digest: Postwar Evolution of Soviet Policy”, Robert Tucker”; “Cable: Bohlen to SecState,” May 14, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 761.xx, LM178, Reel 7, NARA.

²³ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState,” May 14, 1954.

commitment to arms, and therefore, a continued hostile posture towards the West. Likewise, a shift towards consumer goods could be an improvement, since it meant less funding for armaments. It also suggested a greater awareness of the desires of the Soviet people, indicating a government more responsive to the wishes of its citizens, and perhaps therefore more humanitarian. This hope rested on the idea that responsiveness to the citizenry, and desires to alleviate hardships and suffering, were ultimately incompatible with communism and were thus indicative of the possibility of change in Soviet hostility towards the West. Alternatively, policymakers often viewed the Soviet people as peaceable, hardworking, honest folks who were yearning to throw off the communist yoke (a familiar trope in American perceptions of the Soviet people) this could indicate that the government was becoming more responsive in order to address unrest on the part of the Soviet people.²⁴ The U.S. could exploit such unrest.

Upon his return from the USSR, former Eisenhower speechwriter Emmet Hughes stressed to the President that the “consuming preoccupation” in the country was the production of consumer goods rather than armaments. He told Eisenhower that if the USSR was “...politically and psychologically geared for major aggressive war, then we're living in the 16th century and I'm Martin Luther.”²⁵ Yet eyewitness accounts on which this claim were based were unreliable at best due to the restrictions placed on foreigners. Furthermore, the focus on light industry was not clear-cut. Official government figures were the only indication of a shift. The CIA thought that the increased emphasis on consumer goods was a deliberate choice by Malenkov to improve “the lot of the long-suffering Soviet consumer.” This meant revising the goals of the Fifth Five-Year Plan and abandoning the 20-year long priority given to heavy industry. However, a reduction in the rate of growth of defence and a drastic cut in the defence budget would be the result. The CIA was essentially arguing that

²⁴ Extensive work has been done on how Americans viewed Russians (and Soviets). See for example: David Foglesong, *The American Mission and the "Evil Empire": The Crusade for a "Free Russia" Since 1881* (New York: CUP, 2007); “Roots of ‘Liberation’: American Images of the Future of Russia in the Early Cold War, 1948–1953,” *The International History Review* 21, no. 1 (1999): 57–79; David Engerman, *Modernization From the Other Shore: American Intellectuals and the Romance of Russian Development* (Cambridge: HUP, 2003); Stanke notes numerous instances of Eisenhower equating Russians with Americans. See: “Stalin’s Death and Anglo-American Visions of Ending the Cold War, 1953,” 71.

²⁵ It is not clear whether Hughes intended the pun. Emmet Hughes to Eisenhower, January 31, 1954, EHP, Box 1, Folder 5, ML.

Malenkov and the other leaders were making a choice to prioritise the welfare of the Soviet worker over the continued growth of the defence establishment.²⁶

The CIA's conclusions astounded the OIR. The OIR admitted that military spending had "levelled off" from its post-war peak, and could yet stagnate. But it asserted that the U.S. could not take this as indicative of any reduction to the favoured position that the military held in the Soviet economy. Due to the wide-ranging investment programme the military conducted, and the end of hostilities in Korea, the military need not continue with the same level of spending while maintaining an advantage in military preparedness and production. The Soviet consumer could concurrently benefit due to the relative rise in funding available for consumer goods made possible by the aforementioned changes.²⁷ In a scathing assessment of the CIA report the OIR stressed that Malenkov said that the new emphasis on consumer goods was not a reversal in policy: rather, the past success in building heavy industry was what made the current increase in light industry production possible. The differences between the CIA and OIR boiled down to whether the new light industry production reflected a decrease in heavy industry production, or whether the economy could maintain heavy industry production and simultaneously increase consumer goods output as well.²⁸

Whatever the Soviets were intending there was significant disagreement over the effects it would have on Soviet military readiness and on the threat posed by the Soviet Union. Head of DRS Mose Harvey thought that the CIA was overemphasising the importance of the economic changes. He doubted that there was any reduced emphasis on military preparedness or heavy industry.²⁹ The head of the OIR, Allen Evans, felt the criticisms of the CIA report had far reaching implications for the assessment of intelligence on the USSR. He forwarded the report to Park Armstrong, Robert Bowie and head of National Estimates at the

²⁶ "OIR Criticism of CIA/RR IM-383, 'The Implications of the New Soviet Policy,'" March 5, 1954, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 2, CIA Estimates, NARA.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "Memo: Harvey to Evans," March 5, 1954, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 2, CIA Estimates, NARA.

CIA, Sherman Kent. Evans emphasised that their critique was necessary to “...turn back the tide of erroneous exposition... in the NIE process.”³⁰

The State Department accused the CIA of taking Soviet developments too far, and that this was dangerous without verifiably ‘good’ information not only about the situation, but also about Soviet intentions. Essentially the CIA had raised the possibility that increased consumer spending could mean less emphasis on the military, and by extension, a more peaceable Soviet posture. The OIR was alarmed that the CIA would even raise the possibility, fearing that such optimism, however guarded, could taint future estimates of Soviet developments. The disagreement between the CIA and the State Department would come to be part of a larger, longer running battle over how to interpret the changes in the USSR. The CIA would prove to be more accepting of the changes in the USSR and the possibility that they reflected wider changes in the Soviet system and leadership. The State Department consistently downplayed the significance of changes that could see a thaw in the Cold War, and thus require adjustment in their perceptions of the Soviets.

In April Khrushchev stated that although consumer goods production would increase, the emphasis on heavy industry would not slacken. This reinforced the OIR’s position.³¹ Khrushchev’s statements were in line with OIR’s argument that advances in industry allowed an expansion of consumer goods production without a reduction in heavy industry. Although the OIR had detected tensions between Malenkov and Khrushchev, they did not know that Khrushchev’s statement was part of a larger argument over the direction of the Soviet economy. Malenkov’s avocation of light industry was anathema to many in the Presidium, and Khrushchev was taking advantage of this to outmanoeuvre him.³²

Again, the lack of intelligence led existing perceptions to hold sway. Due to the the void of information on the struggle between Khrushchev and Malenkov, the State Department discounted the economic changes in the USSR. But Allen Dulles still stressed the redirection of the Soviet economy towards light

³⁰ “Memo: Evans to Armstrong,” March 12, 1954, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 2, CIA Estimates, NARA.

³¹ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState,” April 26, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 761.xx, LM178, Reel 12, NARA.

³² Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 264–269.

industry. He spoke of the apparent realisation of the new leaders of the need to reorient the Soviet economy. Stalin left a drastically imbalanced economy that massively favoured heavy industry over consumer goods and agriculture. Dulles said that the collective leadership was also aware of the critical decrease in labour productivity due since the average worker was being forced to work too hard for too little in return, be it in the form of low wages or the scarce availability of basic goods. Dulles liked to tell jokes at the expense of the Soviet leaders when giving speeches. He used one in this instance to illustrate the problem the leaders faced:

...a Soviet officer was telling a peasant how the Soviet Union intended to deal with America. "We will pack twenty atom bombs in 20 leather suitcases and distribute them all over America," he said. The peasant nodded doubtfully, whereupon the officer asked him indignantly if he didn't believe the Russians had 20 atom bombs. "Oh, I wasn't thinking of the bombs" the peasant answered. "But where are you going to get the 20 leather suitcases?"³³

Yet the State Department doubted the extent to which the announced shift towards light industry mattered as an indication of a change in the outlook of the Soviet leaders. The State Department considered the budget announced at the Supreme Soviet in April to be an example of Soviet duplicity and continued hostility. Soviet military spending continued at 'Stalinist' levels. Although there were reductions in official military spending, it was likely just better concealed. State Department sources pointed to previous budgets that listed arms development under social and cultural budgetary headings. A total of 43 percent of the budget was classified by State Department analysts as either defence spending, or in unclassified headings that could be used for military purposes.³⁴ Continued investment in heavy industry signified to the U.S. that the Soviets were still expanding such production along Stalinist lines. Indeed, this appeared even more damning since consumer goods, though receiving an increase from eight to fourteen billion roubles, were still allotted far less than the 100 million increase that the military received.³⁵ A *Time* correspondent summed up the views

³³ Allen Dulles, "Speech to Virginia Chamber of Commerce," April 9, 1954, AWDP, Box 107, Folder 2, ML.

³⁴ It does not seem to have dawned on the State Department source (likely Art Abbott, the head of economics in DRS) that consumer goods would never have a similar budget as defence simply due to the final cost of the products. 100 billion roubles towards consumer goods would have given Khrushchev a vastly better kitchen to show off to Nixon in 1957! "'Supreme Soviet', Lambert to Williamson," April 23, 1954, TCD, Reel 155, HL.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

of his State Department source: "Viewing Russia through the Soviet budget, it is difficult to discern any "new look" for the [Soviet] people or the world, any trend towards consumer and peace[able] industry. But it is not hard to spot the "old look" in the military area."³⁶ For most in the administration, the budget represented the true motives of the Soviet leaders.

Changes in Soviet Foreign Policy and U.S. Perceptions

Concurrent with the Soviet de-emphasis on military spending and increase in consumer goods the Soviet leaders made a number of gestures and statements to highlight the changes in foreign policy since Stalin's death. These focussed heavily on ideology, in what would prove to be a foreshadowing of the 20th Party Congress.

The Soviets had been grappling with the doctrine of inevitability of war with capitalism for some time. In November 1953 the Soviet journal *Zvezda* published an article by M. Gus on "The General Line in Soviet Foreign Policy". It stated that human action through the peace movement could indefinitely prevent another world war. Gus' argument was subsequently attacked in the Soviet press under the premise that so long as capitalism existed war would occur at some point. According to Bohlen this revision was likely due to the fact that the inevitability was war was an argument needed by the regime to maintain control. If Gus' argument that war could be paralysed indefinitely was allowed to gain traction then the Soviet people could begin to ask why the USSR and U.S. could not have more normal relations, and why more could not be spent on consumer goods.³⁷

This debate was not only taking place in Soviet journals, but also in the Presidium itself. Malenkov's funeral oration for Stalin began the trend of public statements that emphasised the peaceful resolution of issues between the U.S. and USSR. Almost exactly a year later Malenkov publicly repeated these sentiments. He stressed that relations with the West improved over the previous year. Furthermore, he added that modern atomic warfare must be avoided, as it would

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "Despatch: Bohlen to DeptState," March 8, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 611.xx, LM179, Reel 2, NARA.

spell the end of civilisation. But for all the peaceful rhetoric in his speech, Malenkov attributed the failure of tensions to relax further, and therefore the need for a prepared Soviet military, to “aggressive circles” advocating Western rearmament and the formation of NATO.³⁸

Malenkov’s assertion that the West was responsible would have undermined his own peaceful rhetoric for American ears. Yet it was Molotov’s suggestion that the USSR join NATO, or his proposal for a European Security organisation as an alternative to NATO, that also caused the State Department to view Soviet statements about peace as pure propaganda: Molotov’s suggestions were merely part of the peace campaign to encourage neutralism in Europe and hinder rearmament.³⁹

The meeting of the Supreme Soviet in April 1954 further convinced the State Department that the domestic economic changes in the USSR were not indicative of a larger change in the regime or in foreign policy. Whereas at the Supreme Soviet meeting in 1953 the resolution of differences between the West and USSR was a continuing theme, the 1954 meeting saw a return of Stalin-era bombast. But the DRS had no good explanation why the Soviets reverted to Stalinist rhetoric, offering only that the talk of war was meant to lessen disappointment if promised consumer goods did not materialise. DRS never thought the Soviets were serious about improving relations, emphasising to *Time* correspondents that Stalinism never ended:

If we hadn’t seen Uncle Joe buried, we’d think he was in a back room someplace writing these speeches. They’re right out of his book... “[t]hese ought to convince some people, maybe, there is no ‘new look’ in Russia, that Malenkov and Khrushchev are following faithfully in Stalin’s steps.”⁴⁰

Yet this opinion was not universal. Robert Tucker argued that under Stalin Soviet policy had been characterised by repression at home, tension abroad, and a hardening propaganda line against the West. When Stalin died Tucker stated that “[t]he question following Stalin’s death was not so much whether changes should be introduced but what kind of changes should be made and in what direction the changes should proceed.” The Soviet leaders had to reform: Stalin’s “dead end”

³⁸ “‘Malenkov Election Speech’, Lambert to Gruin,” March 15, 1954, TCD, Reel 153, HL.

³⁹ “‘Supreme Soviet’, Lambert to Gruin,” April 30, 1954, TCD, Reel 155, HL.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

policies would have to go since they had been the “glue” for the Western alliance. There was greater flexibility in formulating policy, according to Tucker.⁴¹

By the end of the summer of 1954 the OIR and DRS had a different take than the one that had been leaked to *Time*. The Soviet conciliatory posture was the best way to achieve their foreign policy objectives. Peaceful coexistence meant to “allay fear in some parts of the non-Communist world, to create the impression that there has been a basic change in Soviet policy, and thereby to destroy the incentive for Western defence and to undermine U.S. policies.” Yet the OIR and DRS concluded that the leaders would have no qualms about returning to aggression whenever they felt it would bring better results.⁴² The peace offensive was apparently just sheep’s clothing, nothing more. Although Ray Thurston, in charge of Eastern European Affairs at the State Department, dismissed seemingly monumental events such as the normalisation of relations between Moscow and Belgrade as a sign of the “change of pace in Moscow since Stalin died”, he dismissed this as part of an alteration in tactics without any modification of the objective.⁴³ The dispute over tactics and objectives aside, there was no discussion of what these changes meant for the U.S.

The prevalence of such a mindset in the Russian section of the State Department meant that when Bohlen sent back an extremely detailed analysis of recent revisions in Soviet communist doctrine it had little effect. Articles in *Kommunist* had captured Bohlen’s attention since they actually *downplayed* the differences between communism and capitalism while arguing that peaceful coexistence was possible between the two systems. These articles represented a continuation of the argument over the inevitability of war that had been continuing for almost a year in Soviet political journals. The most recent of which seemed to be definitive.⁴⁴ But DRS and OIR interpreted this as a red herring. Yet despite the other disagreements with the State Department over the interpretation of Soviet domestic reforms, the CIA agreed that the ultimate objectives of the

⁴¹ “Meeting Digest: Postwar Evolution of Soviet Policy’, Robert Tucker” At this point Tucker was still political secretary at the Moscow embassy. Within the year he would leave to take a position with RAND Corporation.

⁴² “Soviet Capabilities and Intentions.”

⁴³ “Russian-Jug Relations’, Lambert to Gruin,” October 22, 1954, TCD, Reel 162, HL.

⁴⁴ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState,” September 23, 1954, RG59, CDF, 761.00, Box 3813, untitled folder, NARA.

Soviets remained the same, no matter what they said in their journals or the modification in their tactics at the present.⁴⁵ Though it suspected there might be a 'new course', the CIA still thought the goals of Soviet Communism remained the same.

The Union of Social Soviets

Soviet charm itself was noteworthy. A diplomatic reception in November 1953 witnessed what may have been the first genuinely cordial drinking session between the Soviet leaders and Western ambassadors of the post-Stalin era. Bohlen recalled that he and the British and French Ambassadors were invited to drink with Molotov, Bulganin, Kaganovich, Zhukov and Mikoyan, as well as the Chinese Ambassador and Walter Ulbricht. Bohlen, as necessitated by protocol, could not partake in toasts to nations such as the GDR and China that the U.S. did not recognise, but took no offense. Instead, the toasts continued, including ones towards the U.S., Britain and France. The lack of hostility toward the West was noteworthy. Kaganovich became increasingly drunk, uttering more and more "Bolshevik jargon", but never anti-Western slogans.⁴⁶

Just as the change in foreign policy posture and domestic reforms were scrutinised, the apparent newfound conviviality of the Soviet leadership did not go unnoticed. It was less substantial than actual policy changes, but as part of the peace offensive and general softer image the Soviets were trying to foster it was dangerous nonetheless. The new leadership made a sustained effort to be more social, welcoming, and less hostile than was the norm under Stalin. Previously any point of contact between the Soviet leadership and Western representatives was dangerous: Stalin could use these contacts against those he wanted removed. This threat was now gone. But there was more to it: the leaders were certainly aware that they had rivals in the leadership who could make the same charges as Stalin, and so would not have been as convivial as they were unless there was a consensus among the leadership to appear effort to appear friendly at diplomatic receptions.

⁴⁵ Paper Prepared by the DCI, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 2, 778.*

⁴⁶ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState," November 10, 1953, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 611.xx, LM179, Reel 11, NARA; *ibid.*

The transition from angry, cold adversaries to something akin to backslapping, wisecracking uncles was so stark that it gained the attention of the upper echelons of policymakers in Washington. Park Armstrong sent Walter Bedell Smith, acting Secretary of State at the time, an intelligence brief specifically on this topic. It asserted that over the past year the Soviet leaders had consistently sought to lighten the atmosphere and decrease their isolation from the diplomatic community in Moscow. There was a four-fold increase in attendance of Presidium members at public appearances and diplomatic functions, especially Western ones.⁴⁷

Ambassador to the UN Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. cabled Dulles with a report of a seemingly transformed Soviet UN representative Andrey Vyshinsky. Previously dour and vehemently anti-American in his rhetoric, Vyshinsky appeared prior to a Security Council session to greet various other dignitaries, including the Yugoslav representative. According to Lodge "he succeeded in creating the impression that he was relaxing his previous aloofness." His entourage went out of their way to be jovial. Lodge did not think there was anything to this other than a way to make it seem like there was meaningful change in the Kremlin, and as part of a larger campaign to drag out disarmament talks and stall the EDC.⁴⁸ Allen Dulles also noted the increased fraternisation with the West, but discounted any greater change in Soviet objectives.⁴⁹ Furthermore, Bohlen discussed with Malenkov the difficulty for Western diplomats to make informal contacts with their Soviet counterparts and received assurances in return that this was being addressed.⁵⁰ The following month the State Department reported a marked increase in the number of receptions attended by Soviet officials, counting nine in November 1954 alone.⁵¹ Bohlen noted that Malenkov and the other Presidium members went out of their way to emphasise their serious desire for normal relations with the U.S.⁵²

⁴⁷ "Memo: Armstrong to Acting SecState," September 21, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 761.xx, LM178, Reel 8, NARA.

⁴⁸ "Cable: Lodge to SecState," October 15, 1954, RG59, CDF 1950-54, 611.xx, LM179, Reel 2, NARA.

⁴⁹ "Governor's Briefing."

⁵⁰ Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, November 8, 1954, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1257-58.

⁵¹ "'Contacts in Moscow', Beal to Williamson," December 9, 1954, TCD, Reel 164, HL.

⁵² Cable: Bohlen to DeptState, November 8, 1954, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 1257-60.

The State Department informed *Time* correspondents that the greater availability of Soviet officials made further informal contacts possible. They were making themselves available to journalists and diplomats in a manner not witnessed before. Though the State Department clearly recognised the advantages of increased informal contacts between diplomats, it dismissed the change of attitude. It was thought that the Soviets recognised it could only advance the new course more generally if they appeared good-natured. Indeed, there was even an element of anti-Stalinism detected in it insofar as it was the opposite of what Stalin did since the Second World War.⁵³ Again, the administration dismissed the Soviet changes as long as the reasons for them were not honourable to American eyes.

The Influence of Public Opinion and Domestic Politics

The jovial attitude displayed by the Soviet leaders was in stark contrast to the scourge of red baiting in the U.S. In 1953, McCarthyism was very much a political force. By January 1954, polls showed support for McCarthy at its highest point ever: 50 percent approved of him. However, the number of people disapproving of him was also at its highest point: 29 percent, as more and more people became polarised by his actions and no longer answered 'no opinion'. This trend continued, and by March 1954, support had declined to 46 percent, and those holding an unfavourable opinion of him rose to 36 percent. As a result, the GOP took steps to distance themselves from him.⁵⁴

In this instance, public opinion caused Eisenhower to remain weary of Soviet gestures. Politically there was too much risk. Eisenhower was notoriously cautious of McCarthy and the right wing of the GOP. He deferred from denouncing right wing excesses during the 1952 campaign. Once in office, Eisenhower was keen on maintaining party unity.⁵⁵ Support for McCarthy and his

⁵³ "'Contacts in Moscow', Beal to Williamson."

⁵⁴ "'How People Rate McCarthy'" (U.S. News and World Report, March 19, 1954), RG59, OPOS, Box 20, Public Evaluation of the Foreign Service of the US, 1954-1955, NARA.

⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 272, 304; Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Vol. 2: The President, 1952-1969*, 55-62; Some, such as Ambrose, think that Eisenhower's handling of McCarthy was intentional, and part of his leadership style. See the discussion of his personality in the introduction, and specifically: Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand*; After Bohlen's nomination Eisenhower was aware that he could not expend as much political capital in Congress against the right wing of his own party. Corti and

tactics may have been on the wane, but it was still substantial. The fear of communism that McCarthy was trumpeting was not yet lessening.

Dulles was perhaps even more aware of public and Congressional opinion and the power it could have to destroy his foreign policy plans. Dulles had written a reference for Alger Hiss, and had worked with him to set up the UN. Such skeletons were especially dangerous. But Dulles also may have agreed that the State Department had not been as rigorous as it should have been with security. A staunch McCarthyite, McLeod was made security chief to vet State Department Staff.⁵⁶

Such concern over domestic opinion would have militated any desire to seek peace with the new Soviet leadership. Even had there been more concrete proof of a change in outlook in the Soviet leadership, the domestic situation made it too dangerous to risk. Enemies of the administration could too easily distort it for political gain. Yet by March, public support for McCarthy was on the wane, and the outcome of the Army hearings further dented McCarthy's reputation. Therefore, if domestic politics was the primary reason for not probing Soviet peace offers it would be reasonable to have expected the administration to become more amenable to this as the domestic political atmosphere became more conducive to détente. Yet this did not happen. At the end of 1954 Eisenhower and Dulles still rejected the idea of change in the USSR that could be more than tactical.

One explanation is that although public approval of McCarthy and his followers was falling, the polls the State Department relied upon showed reduced public optimism about relations with the USSR. 42 percent of respondents thought the situation with the USSR was getting worse, while only 29 percent thought it was improving. A staggering 63 percent felt that there was going to be another world war, and 60 percent predicted that the U.S. would have to fight the Soviets "sooner or later". This was the most pessimistic poll result since the autumn of 1952. Yet in the face of this pessimism, 62 percent of people still

Ruddy also highlight how the administration dealt with the supposed scandal involving Bohlen's brother-in-law, Charles Thayer, also a foreign service officer. After rumours of homosexuality were uncovered by the FBI, the administration forced him to resign to prevent further damage from the Bohlen nomination. Corti and Ruddy, "Bohlen-Thayer Dilemma," 122.

⁵⁶ Richard H. Immerman, "Eisenhower and Dulles: Who Made the Decisions?," *Political Psychology* 1, no. 2 (Autumn 1979): 34.

supported a meeting between Eisenhower and Malenkov. This optimism was more restrained than in the past year, but the prevailing sentiment was that the U.S. should at least try.⁵⁷ By the end of 1954 those feeling that war was coming “sooner or later” lessened to 57 percent. Interestingly, the press was more optimistic in this regard.⁵⁸

The seemingly contradictory opinions held by the public about U.S.-Soviet relations could have led the administration either to attempt new initiatives, or towards a retrenchment of existing policies and ideas about the USSR. In this case public opinion offered no clear incentive either way. As a result the administration took no risks. Indeed, to someone like Dulles, the public pessimism would have supported his own views of the Soviet leaders. Rather than pessimistic or rigid, he would have thought himself supported in his realism about the situation.

Chapter Conclusion

The apparent changes to the Soviet military budget, structural reforms, and charm offensive were no match for the political caution and ingrained perceptions of the Soviets held in the administration. There was yet no significant change in how the Eisenhower administration conceived of the Soviet Union, the Soviets were still seen as possessing the same threatening and qualities they did in 1953.

At the beginning of 1954 Dulles addressed the Council on Foreign Relations and summarised the foreign situation and the threat of communism. Using the language he had established as his hallmark over the past year he emphasised that the U.S. must plan for the Cold War in the long-term since communists were planning for “an entire historical era”. Lenin and Stalin had given instructions to weaken and bankrupt the West gradually. Stalin noted that once this was achieved it would “be the moment for the decisive blow.” Dulles’ used Soviet communist doctrine to buttress his argument for massive retaliation and the EDC, both of which would strengthen the West in an economically

⁵⁷ “OR: Current Attitudes on the Likelihood of War and Relations with the Soviet Union,” October 13, 1954, RG59, OPOS, Box 45, Russia 1953-55, NARA.

⁵⁸ “Monthly Survey of American Opinion No.164,” December 1954, RG59, OPOS, Box 12, Monthly Survey 1954, NARA.

effective manner through nuclear weapons and collective security. Rebuffing the apparent modification in Soviet outlook and mannerisms over the past year, Dulles rejected that there was any fundamental change in the mindset of the leadership; only a pragmatic realisation that their hold on power was best served by acknowledging human nature:

There are signs that the rulers are bending to some of the human desires of their people. There are promises of more food, more household goods, and more economic freedom. That does not prove that the Soviet rulers have themselves been converted. It is rather that they may be dimly perceiving a basic fact, that is that there are limits to the power of any rulers indefinitely to suppress the human spirit.⁵⁹

Compared with Dulles' feelings about the new Soviet posture at the end of the year there was little difference. Though Soviet tactics were modified, Soviet hostility remained. The new 'soft' line was a shift indeed, but one only meant to encourage neutralism and this divide the West. He conceded that the U.S. should be ready for talks with the Soviets, but without relaxing its defence and certainly without any expectations of change on the part of the Soviets. At this time Dulles' was motivated by a desire to satisfy world opinion rather than a genuine desire for resolving issues. Indeed, efforts towards negotiations should be crafted towards "[e]xposing the falsity of the Communists' "conciliatory" line and placing on them the onus for the persistence of unsettled problems, tension and the danger of war..." and forcing the Soviets to give substance to the peace offensive.⁶⁰

Thus, Dulles' naturally cautious nature meant he was frustrated that anyone took the Soviet new course seriously. He would not sanction action that offered even the consideration of serious change in the USSR. Inside the White House, both Dulles and Eisenhower were criticised for their inaction. In the months after Stalin's death those fond of psychological warfare proposed various courses of action to distract the Soviet leadership from foreign policy by manipulating tensions within the leadership and promoting nationalism within the Soviet Bloc. Allies who feared provoking the Soviets stymied this. In this regard the East German Uprising and Beria's arrest and execution represented

⁵⁹ "PR: Text of Dulles Speech to CFR," January 12, 1954, CFRP, Box 444, Folder 4, ML.

⁶⁰ Dulles' suggestions for revision of NSC-162/2, Slany, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 2, 772, 775.*

missed opportunities.⁶¹ Indeed C.D. Jackson had left the administration precisely because he felt his position in this matter had been ineffective. Jackson thought that in 1954 the danger of hostilities with the Soviets would be at its lowest point since the end of the Second World War. He told Eisenhower and Dulles in February 1954 that if they had “the guts and the skill to maintain constant pressure at all points of the Soviet orbit” significant gains would result; yet “everyone agreed, and nothing happened.” Jackson blamed Dulles’, stating that bold action was prevented by fears of provoking the Soviets.⁶²

Dulles’ perceptions of the Soviets and his innate conservatism prevented him from either having a more nuanced view of changes in the Soviet Union, or of advocating a more dynamic policy to promote change. But it was not only Dulles who was reticent to modify his views. Ray Thurston, Director of the office of Eastern European Affairs in the State Department, took a similarly jaundiced view of Soviet foreign policy changes. Indeed, to Thurston even the Yugoslav rapprochement did not indicate any change in Soviet objectives.⁶³ This is yet another instance of those watching the Kremlin, who certainly had a grasp of the magnitude of such actions, dismissing them as without further meaning other than immediate tactical gain for the Kremlin. A longer-term vision of what these changes may have meant for the Soviet system was non-existent. Thurston’s position indicated that Dulles was not unique in his doubt of the Soviets.

Allen Dulles similarly thought that the Soviet leaders had not altered their objectives, which remained “the elimination of every world power center capable of competing with the USSR, [and] the spread of Communism to all parts of the world”. But Dulles thought that the Soviets had not simply embarked on their ‘soft’ line in foreign policy *only* to divide the West. Rather, he recognized that the Soviet leaders likely realised that the achievement of their objectives was a long-term project and therefore coexistence was preferable in the interim.⁶⁴ In line with the CIA’s reports on domestic reforms Dulles did not seem to be willing to jettison

⁶¹ “United States Foreign Policy,” May 16, 1954, Eisenhower-Dulles Papers, Series 3, Box 8, Folder 4, ML.

⁶² “Memo: CD Jackson to Louis Banks, 11.11.54,” n.d., CD Jackson Papers, Box 8, Ba-Misc (1), DDEL Jackson would later meet with Dulles and come away convinced that it was Eisenhower who was really behind the “inaction” of the Administration. See chapter 6.

⁶³ “‘Russian-Jug Relations’, Lambert to Gruin.”

⁶⁴ Paper Prepared by the DCI, November 18, 1954, Slany, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 2, 778-779*.

all chance of there being some longer term implications of the recent changes, even if Soviet objectives were seen as static. Allen Dulles realised that coexistence was a relative term. He highlighted that in the face of the Western military build-up the Soviets were now relying on their extensive subversive network. This network “dwarf[ed] the Comintern of pre-war days.”⁶⁵

Allen Dulles was not alone in his assessments. At the end of 1954 The NSC Planning Board remained convinced that the Soviets had not modified their basic hostility towards the U.S. As such, they would seek to expand their power “by every means they find advantageous.” The peace offensive and diplomatic niceties were the best current methods of advancing Soviet communism. However, the best response to the changed Soviet tactics was a point of contention. The State Department felt that negotiation was a useful means of exposing Soviet insincerity with the peace offensive. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), however, felt this was dangerous, and that talks should only take place if there was an actual change in Soviet objectives.⁶⁶ Essentially the JCS felt the U.S. should only negotiate if the Soviets first quit being communists. The State Department, JCS, and CIA all agreed that since the Soviet leaders remained committed to spreading communism, any changes that occurred inside the Kremlin in terms of leadership, foreign policy, or doctrine, were ultimately inconsequential.

⁶⁵ “Allen Dulles Speech to University of Chicago Law School Alumni,” November 30, 1954, CREST, CIA-RDP84-00161R000100150015-8, NARA.

⁶⁶ Draft Statement Prepared by NSC Planning Board, December 14, 1954. Slany, *FRUS: 1952-1954*, Vol. 2, 810-11, 819.

Chapter 3: What the Leadership Changes Meant for the U.S.

Malenkov Ousted

The Soviet leadership was of great interest to the administration because in the absence of reliable intelligence about Soviet intentions it remained the best indication of the trajectory of Soviet policy. The changes after Stalin's death and Beria's purge made many suspicious of the stability of the leadership. There were clear differences among the Soviet leaders on how to proceed in domestic and foreign affairs, which were closely intertwined. Thus the continuing assessments of possible power struggles and the fortunes of the men involved offer insights into the mindsets of those who wrote them and the influence they had on perceptions of the Soviet leaders.

Throughout 1953-54 American officials in both Washington and Moscow were careful to note any indications of tension between Soviet leaders. By mid-1954 the administration thought Khrushchev was on par with Malenkov, and possibly was the more powerful leader owing to his position as First Secretary of the CPSU and the support he commanded from the military. When Malenkov was ousted in January 1955, no one had predicted it would happen at that moment. But it was not a complete surprise to administration either.

In early January 1955 Bohlen reported that Khrushchev was the most powerful member of the Presidium. Since Stalin's death, Khrushchev had consistently improved his position among the other leaders, but Bohlen did not think this meant there was a power struggle. Rather he fit all this into a longer-term pattern of "readjustment" since Stalin's death. Indeed, Bohlen doubted the rise of Khrushchev was necessarily anything personal, but rather more likely to reflect the popularity of Khrushchev's policy positions.¹

Given Bohlen's report, no one in the administration should have been surprised by Malenkov's downfall- Bohlen made it clear that it was more as if Khrushchev rolled Malenkov down a hill than pushed him off a cliff. Yet the first reports of Malenkov's final eclipse were from William Forrest, correspondent for

¹ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1068," January 8, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

the *British News Chronicle*. Forrest was obviously aware that Malenkov had been of decreasing stature for over a year, but that hardly made for good copy; it was better to say that the “Kremlin Struggle for Power is On”.² Forrest speculated that Khrushchev would come out on top, and that this would be the end of peaceful coexistence.³

It was possible that Forrest learned of the situation in the Kremlin through a leak in the British embassy in Moscow. The Foreign Office, however, did not think that the leadership was in crisis. Like Bohlen, it was of the opinion that the post-Stalin situation was simply evolving. Indeed, the Foreign Office went as far as to say that Khrushchev was simply acting as a spokesman.⁴ It emphasised that the fact that Khrushchev was “throwing his weight around” did not necessarily indicate a power struggle- even if the rivalry between Malenkov and Khrushchev had long since set in.⁵ Those in Whitehall were seemingly reticent to dispatch with the idea that collective leadership had ended. Whitehall was not alone in its caution, as the Quai d’Orsay, while publicly having little comment on the developments, expressed off the record that Malenkov could merely be giving Khrushchev enough rope to hang himself.⁶ Once again, various verdicts were reached from those in different circumstances, illustrating that with incomplete information perception and circumstance heavily influence conclusions.

Developments further down the pecking order fed the perception that power shifts were underway. When Anastas Mikoyan was sacked as Minister of Trade in late January it seemed to Bohlen that the Soviet emphasis on light

² “Cable: Butterworth to SecState, No.3266,” January 12, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

³ “Despatch: Chipman to DeptState, Forrest Article Attached, No.1978,” January 12, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA. Forrest noted that recent trials against those who partook in the Leningrad purge (Abakumov’s for example) were aimed at Malenkov, since he was benefitted most from them.

⁴ *Ibid.*; “Despatch: Chipman to DeptState, Times Article Attached, No.2023,” January 17, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

⁵ “Cable: Butterworth to SecState, No.3185,” January 20, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

⁶ “Cable: Achilles to SecState, No.3056,” January 20, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

industry was being reversed.⁷ *Time* correspondents in Washington viewed this as one possibility, and were quick to emphasise that this meant a return to 'Stalinist' heavy industry. This suited *Time's* narrative of the Cold War, which necessitated portraying the USSR as the evil 'other' in a 'us versus them' mentality. *Time* also pointed to the possibility that Mikoyan's apparent downfall could be the beginning of the downfall of someone larger, such as Malenkov.⁸ *Time* proved prescient in this instance, and Malenkov's ouster was announced in early February. In London, the press feted Forrest as the "hero of Fleet Street" and the Foreign Office was taken by surprise.⁹ As a journalist Forrest was not hamstrung by politics and thus did not need to exercise the level of caution of those in governments.

In Washington, the Kremlin shift sparked frenzied analysis by the DRS and the CIA. DRS predicted little change in policy as a result of the shift since Malenkov had not been sole leader since the spring of 1954 at the latest. Indeed, the DRS thought that Malenkov's departure was part of a process that had begun soon after Stalin's death.¹⁰ Such an interpretation of Khrushchev's rise is interesting since DRS had long supported the notion of a power struggle in the Kremlin. Its definition of a 'power struggle' seemed more akin to a marathon than a wrestling match.

At the next meeting of the NSC, Allen Dulles noted that the signs of Malenkov's fall had been visible for over a year. This was not necessarily due to a failure on Malenkov's part, but rather the outcome of the 'second round' of the struggle that began after Stalin's death. The difference between Malenkov and Beria was that since Malenkov had not tried to usurp power for himself, the other leaders did not purge him. However, according to Dulles the current battle

⁷ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1172," January 25, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

⁸ "'Washington Story Suggestions', Washington Staff to Williamson," January 24, 1955, TCD, Reel 166, HL.

⁹ "Cable: Aldrich to SecState, No.3501," February 8, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

¹⁰ "DRS Special Paper No. 106," February 10, 1955, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 1, Khrushchev, Nikita S., NARA.

represented the death of collective leadership, and Khrushchev was now dominant. Khrushchev had thus far used policy to marginalise Malenkov. He was blamed for the lack of success of the consumer goods programme, as well as the failure of the 'soft line' in Europe and the reversals that the USSR had suffered there in the past years.¹¹

Kremlin intrigues represented a 'black box' to Western intelligence. Therefore, agreement was seldom universal about the causes and repercussions of power shifts. The exhaustive 70-page report the CIA published in late March highlighted this since it was not completely in line with Dulles' own report to the NSC. Indeed, at this time the CIA was not even sure when exactly Malenkov was ousted.¹² The CIA report stated that Malenkov likely fell victim to the collective leadership as a whole, rather than Khrushchev alone. But the report also stated that Khrushchev did not appear strong enough to dominate the other leaders-though he undoubtedly enjoyed their support.¹³ The report was balanced in its reflections on the reasoning for Malenkov's downfall. One theory was that his demotion represented the outcome of a personal power rivalry. The other position argued that it was a conflict over policy matters. There were in fact many possibilities involving an element of both of these factors: the CIA highlighted that Malenkov could have simply been the scapegoat for the failure of the consumer goods drive, or that the collective leadership had degenerated into a fight over "Stalin's mantle".¹⁴

Just as the CIA acknowledged a number of possibilities, so did numerous sources in the administration. The month prior to Malenkov's dismissal was marked by frequent attacks against those who supported light industry;¹⁵ in other words, Malenkov and his supporters. In the West, policy was seen as the main

¹¹ "Memo: 236th NSC Meeting," February 10, 1955, AWF, NSCS, Box 6, DDEL.

¹² William Randolph Hearst Jr., Joseph Kingsbury-Smith and Frank Conniff visited the Kremlin in February and interviewed Bulganin. "Interview of NA Bulganin with American Journalists," *Soviet Weekly*, February 24, 1955, HSP Box 370, Folder 7, CUL; The journalistic results were self-congratulatory, to say the least. See: WR Hearst Jr., "Report on Russia-Uncensored!," *Chicago American*, February 27, 1955, HSP Box 370, Folder 7, CUL.

¹³ "The Resignation of Malenkov," March 1955, CREST, CIA-RDP91T01172R000200250001-3, NARA.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

driver behind the recent shift. Bohlen was the most prominent official who took this view. He felt that the struggle was essentially over the future direction of the USSR. It could advocate heavy industry and further develop its military potential; or it could pursue light industry and improve the standard of living. Bohlen pointed to long-term indications of this tension as far back as the beginning of 1954, and hesitated to call the situation a 'triumph' for Khrushchev. As far as anyone could tell, the collective leadership as a whole ousted Malenkov. Khrushchev's support for heavy industry- that he emphasised along with the problem of German rearmament- seemed to indicate a return to a tougher line in Soviet foreign policy. Yet Bohlen insisted that 'tougher' did not mean 'Stalinist', but was simply a different tack than that taken in 1953-54.¹⁶ He also emphasised the importance of agriculture in the policy debate, citing it as a key component of Khrushchev's power. Indeed, if agriculture were favoured, it would have been at the expense of light, and not heavy, industry.¹⁷ Bohlen, however, felt that these rivalries were a result of policy differences, and that the policy differences themselves were the true impetus behind the shift in power.¹⁸

Kennan, a long time friend of Bohlen's, disagreed. In his guise as a CIA consultant Kennan argued that it was precisely the issue of rivalry that was to blame for the shakeup. The policy differences, as far as he could see, were not strong enough to cause such an open break. Kennan argued that honest policy differences had always been allowed inside the Presidium, and never had personal political consequences, provided the final decision was respected and

¹⁶ "Cable: Dulles to South American and Caribbean Posts, No.06247," February 15, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

¹⁷ Bohlen felt strongly enough about the issue to take Foster Dulles to task over it. Dulles had forwarded a synopsis of Bohlen's views to numerous U.S. diplomatic posts, but omitted the section on the agricultural issue. "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1332," February 16, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA; "Cable: Dulles to South American and Caribbean Posts, No.06247"; Soviet specialists in the Quai d'Orsay reached much the same conclusion as Bohlen, pointing to Khrushchev's schemes for expanding food production in Siberia and Kazakhstan. But the French did not wholly discount the role that personal rivalries could have played in the power struggle. "Cable: Achilles to Dulles, No.3377," February 11, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

¹⁸ "Cable: Dulles to South American and Caribbean Posts, No.06247."

such disagreement not voiced outside a very small group.¹⁹ Kennan thought that policy was being used to further personal political ambitions. Referencing broader issues of Soviet reform since Stalin's death, Kennan pointed to a fundamental disagreement over changes in Soviet economic policy. One such issue was whether coercion could still be used to increase production, or whether incentives (in the form of consumer goods) were needed. This in turn impacted whether light industry would be favoured: if more emphasis was going to be placed on agriculture, the Kremlin needed to give farmers something on which to spend the money. This in turn affected foreign policy: those who supported light industry must have felt that the international situation would be stable for the immediate future, since reduced emphasis on heavy industry would have an impact on military preparedness.²⁰

Both positions held dangers for the Soviets- not supporting heavy industry flew in the face 30 years of economic dogma. But agriculture was in a desperate state. Both Malenkov and Khrushchev developed plans to increase agricultural production. Malenkov's seemed to be better in the long-run, Khrushchev's in the short run. According to Kennan, this allowed Khrushchev to argue that Malenkov was not taking the immediate interests of the Soviet people into account. Combined with Malenkov's support for increased consumer goods, Khrushchev was in a perfect position to attack Malenkov for 'right deviationism'. Kennan did not think this was coincidental. Kennan saw an opportunity for the U.S. to foster 'Titoist' tendencies by extending an olive branch to the USSR- thus cutting the ground beneath those who favoured heavy industry and continued tensions, and proving Malenkov right.²¹

Dulles echoed Kennan, stating that rivalry was behind the power shift and that it was certainly more important than policy differences.²² There were a number of reasons that the idea of infighting would have appealed to Dulles. For

¹⁹ "Memo: Changes in Soviet Leadership," February 11, 1955, GFKP, Box 7, Folder 14, ML.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Cable: Dulles to Paris, Bonn, Moscow, No.05245," February 12, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA; "Cable: Dulles to South American and Caribbean Posts, No.06247."

one, it fit in with his perception of the Presidium as filled with conspiratorial Bolsheviks well trained in the arts of deceit and infighting. Dulles also did not think there had been any substantial change in Soviet policies during Malenkov's tenure. Therefore, the idea that there had been a falling out based purely on policy matters would not have made much sense to Dulles.

Perceptions of the Kremlin Power Structure and Collective Leadership

At the end of January 1955, Eisenhower approved NSC-5505 setting out the objectives of U.S. political warfare against the Soviet Bloc. Among these were a reduction of Bloc capabilities and alteration in Soviet policies in order to reduce the threat posed to the U.S. These were further subdivided into four sub-objectives, one of which was to "[i]ncrease the chance of evolutionary change over time of a nature to reduce the Soviet threat."²³ Given the historical animosity between the U.S. and USSR, perhaps the most surprising part of NSC-5505 was the following:

It is sometimes assumed that a necessary and sufficient condition for the achievement of all three of these objectives is the removal or overthrow of the present Soviet regime. It is not safe to assume that it is either a necessary or a sufficient condition. While unlikely, it is not impossible that over a number of years or decades the policies of the regime might evolve in ways favorable to U.S. interest.²⁴

The NSC agreed that the Soviet system could reform. Of course, the likelihood of this was an issue of considerable debate. However, such a notion was hardly viable under Stalin. Thus, there was a clear recognition of change in the USSR away from Stalinism.

As a result NSC-5505 asserted that the U.S. should adopt a strategy that would promote evolutionary change in the USSR. It should "encourage the current trend toward 'constitutionalizing government' rather than a return to the Stalinist system." The U.S. should be aware of the divisive issues in the Soviet hierarchy: consumer goods, police power, agriculture, and foreign policy. This

²³ "NSC 5505/1: Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities."

²⁴ Ibid.

would allow U.S. policy to be crafted in a way that would encourage outcomes favourable to U.S. interests.²⁵ Furthermore, the objectives of NSC-5505 were in stark contrast to Dulles' statement just after Stalin's death that the U.S. needed to disintegrate the USSR in order to win the Cold War.²⁶ Perceptions were clearly changing.

Yet this all rested on who was in charge, and in this vein various agencies responsible for divining the current trends in the Kremlin provided numerous angles on the leadership situation. The hallmark of all this was the emphasis on a power struggle, what exactly a power struggle constituted, and how likely one was. Unaware of the statements of NSC-5505, some outside the administration such as *Time*, other press outlets, and certain academics such as Walt Rostow, rejected the idea that there had been substantial change in the Soviet system, even if there had been in the leadership, and continued to hope for a power struggle.

Dulles' view that personal rivalry was at the core of the Kremlin power shifts was related to the long standing hope in a number of quarters of the Eisenhower administration that an overt power struggle would break out. So far this had not happened. Nevertheless, Malenkov's ouster reignited the speculation that changes in the Kremlin could serve U.S. interests and thus scrutiny continued.

The CIA noted certain differences from past power shifts that indicated a new manner of business in the Kremlin. Rather than being killed, as was the norm under Stalin, Malenkov was merely demoted. Indeed, the fact that the collective leadership continued was itself a significant break. The Presidium indeed seemed to be acting collectively- at least insofar as no one member could take such actions without the consent of the other members. The CIA predicted that Khrushchev would have to cooperate with the "old Bolsheviks" (Molotov, Bulganin, Kaganovich) in order to maintain his leadership. Furthermore, the fact that Khrushchev appointed Zhukov as minister of defence underlined that he was not following Stalin's lead. Stalin would never have appointed someone so popular to

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ "Memo: NSC Special Meeting."

a post of such power. The assumption was that Khrushchev was doing so to cooperate with Zhukov, or in exchange for his support in ousting Malenkov. The CIA did not foresee Khrushchev claiming the Premiership as Malenkov did- rather, Khrushchev would be “cagey”, and control the government through the Party Secretariat.²⁷

The emphasis on the Party was recognised by the intelligence apparatus in the State Department, which noted that the Party appeared to be the paramount institution in governing the USSR, and seemed to be working with the Army, via Zhukov, to use the popularity of the military for the Party’s benefit.²⁸ This fact, just as in 1954, led to a great deal of consideration of the position of the military in Soviet policymaking. William Forrest argued that while the army had indeed become more visible in the wake of Malenkov’s ouster, true power still resided in the Party Presidium. Now that Zhukov was both defence minister and in the Presidium it seemed obvious that the military would have a greater voice in Party affairs. Some in the State Department saw this as a distinctly good thing.²⁹

General Lucius Clay told Eisenhower that Zhukov and the military were now the real powers behind the throne.³⁰ But according to the State Department the Army was not a threat to power. Both Bulganin and Zhukov were close to Khrushchev. Instead, the regime was simply fostering the *image* of the army having a more prominent role. In addition, 77 percent of army personnel were Party or Komsomol members. As such, there was little chance of a military coup or a power struggle between the two, especially as the State Department asserted

²⁷ “Shifts in Leadership and Policies in Moscow,” February 9, 1955, CREST, CIA-RDP79R00890A000500020005-5, NARA.

²⁸ “Memo: Howe to UnderSecState,” May 5, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 2, NARA. Using the prestige of the Army to benefit his own position was something that Stalin would never have considered- and indeed Stalin had been responsible for Zhukov’s exile after the Second World War. In this sense, Zhukov’s return was an implicit form of destalinisation.

²⁹ After his success in “predicting” Malenkov’s downfall, the reports of William Forrest were frequently referenced in dispatches from London. “Cable: Aldrich to Dulles, No.3547,” February 10, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

³⁰ “Memo: 237th NSC Meeting,” February 17, 1955, AWF, NSCS, Box 6, DDEL.

that Soviet officers thought more about personal advancement than political power.³¹

Bohlen argued that the position of the military did not affect the Soviet hierarchy at all. The elevation of Bulganin to Premier would not affect Party-Army relations since he was primarily a politician. As for Zhukov, it was not the first time a professional soldier held the position of minister of defence, as many claimed. Bohlen saw little reason that the mere presence of Zhukov would enhance the fortunes of the Army. Nor was there evidence that the military was playing a greater role in politics than in the past. Malenkov's dismissal appeared to have been something sorted out within the top party ranks. Instead, the military had improved its position mostly by virtue of Stalin's death. Policy choices, in this case the re-emergence of heavy industry as the primary beneficiary in the Soviet planned economy, was all that indicated the military was in a slightly better position.³²

The fortunes of the army notwithstanding, the intrigues of the Kremlin continued to foster hopes of a power struggle. Due to the dearth of reliable information any sort of rumour was considered valuable intelligence. The dispatches of *Time* correspondents illustrated that this lack of verifiable information was not an issue when providing copy to their editors, nor to their sources in the State Department who furnished them with such material. The State Department filled in the blanks with its own interpretation of events. A series of dispatches on the Khrushchev-Malenkov 'affair' credited the 'old Bolsheviks' with special "cunning" in their ouster of Malenkov. The State Department did not think that the fact that Malenkov was not executed indicated change in the Kremlin. *Time* cited the numerous demotions of Molotov through the years as proof of this. Rather, Khrushchev kept Malenkov in the Presidium as a useful scapegoat in case new agricultural policies failed.³³ Bohlen agreed with *Time* on this matter, echoing the possible use of Malenkov as a scapegoat. What

³¹ "'Khrushchev IV', Beal to Williamson & Saint," February 11, 1955, TCD, Reel 167, HL.

³² "Despatch: Bohlen to DeptState, No.365," March 19, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

³³ "'Khrushchev', Beal to Williamson & Saint," February 11, 1955, TCD, Reel 167, HL.

was of specific interest to Bohlen though, was that Khrushchev had consolidated power through promotion of his cronies rather than execution of opponents.³⁴ In this regard, Bohlen realised the change from Stalinism. For those who felt there had been little departure from Stalinism since 1953, the fact that Malenkov retained his Presidium position, not to mention was still alive, was problematic for a perception of the USSR as Stalinist.

Indeed, *Time* promoted the idea of Malenkov as sole leader since dictatorship was necessary for their editorial position of an unchanged and Stalinist USSR. However, with the exception of a brief period after Stalin's death no one in the administration ever truly thought Malenkov had attained any sort of total power. Malenkov's association with the consumer goods drive and the appearance of articles criticising light industry indicated that there was a split in policy, hardly something that happens in a dictatorship. Malenkov's public statements tended to support the drive, while Khrushchev's gave only qualified support. Yet the fact that the drive happened at all suggests that Malenkov was not the only backer of the programme, and must have had a majority in the Presidium.³⁵ Indeed, it was in the period from Stalin's death to Malenkov's dismissal that highlighted that collective leadership was succeeding- though not always harmoniously. Bohlen certainly thought so. Although Malenkov's defeat meant that Khrushchev was the most powerful member of the Presidium it was premature to think that collective leadership was finished.³⁶ This was anathema to anyone who felt that Soviet Communism was inherently totalitarian. *Time* attacked Bohlen for his position.

The durability of the collective leadership seemed to be greater than *Time* gave credit. The CIA felt that it was still a viable situation, and that collective

³⁴ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1464," March 5, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

³⁵ "The Resignation of Malenkov."

³⁶ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1278," February 9, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA; "The Resignation of Malenkov"; Robert Tucker, formerly secretary at the Moscow embassy and now at RAND Corporation, felt that Khrushchev now had enough power in the Party and government in combination with Bulganin to take control. Tucker remained in contact with Beam, who relayed this information to Washington. Jacob Beam to Walworth Barbour and Mose Harvey, March 2, 1955, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 98, USSR, 2 of 2, NARA.

leadership was now a hallmark of the Kremlin. Beria's purge and Malenkov's ousting may have weakened collectivity, but Khrushchev was not supreme. The Kremlin seemed to be carefully continuing to cultivate the image of collectivity. Meeting with the Hearst delegation in January, Bulganin stressed that "principle of collective leadership with us is unshakeable." The CIA concluded, "collective leadership appears to remain a fact".³⁷ Given the State Department's faith in the emergence of a power struggle, the conclusions of the CIA made it clear that division remained on this issue. Though Malenkov's dismissal was a more of a power transfer rather than a purge, the head of Russian Affairs at the State Department, Walter Stoessel, asserted that a power struggle was still going on. Though Khrushchev was the most powerful, he did not think he had consolidated power. Stoessel leaked as much to *Time* correspondents, feeding their interpretation that the issue of power in the Kremlin was necessarily one of violent intrigue.³⁸ Rumours of Malenkov's liquidation began to circulate among Western governments when he was not seen at the closing session of the Supreme Soviet.³⁹ The rumours proved to be false, but it illustrated the degree to which Western intelligence, and therefore perceptions, often relied heavily on hearsay.

Indeed, many in Washington seemed to be letting their imaginations run wild. In the midst of this, Bohlen remained the singular voice arguing that there was nothing to indicate a crisis in the Kremlin. He felt that even though there were differences in opinion within the Presidium, collective leadership was not finished. According to the Moscow embassy, Khrushchev had to take the opinions of the leaders into account since his position was not at all 'Stalinist'. Therefore, the embassy felt that the opinions expressed in the Soviet press were also the opinion of the Presidium. These articles stressed the importance of collective

³⁷ "The Resignation of Malenkov"; Robert Tucker, formerly secretary at the Moscow embassy and now at RAND Corporation, felt that Khrushchev now had enough power in the Party and government in combination with Bulganin to take control. Tucker remained in contact with Beam, who relayed this information to Washington. Beam to Barbour and Harvey, March 2, 1955.

³⁸ "'Soviet Shifts', Beal to Boyle," March 24, 1955, TCD, Reel 168, HL.

³⁹ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1670," March 28, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

leadership, and cited Lenin as the ideal collective leader.⁴⁰ However, many in DRS still considered Khrushchev to be the sole leader in the Kremlin.⁴¹

Louis Halle, formerly on the PPS and now ensconced in academia, maintained some influence in administration despite his falling out with Dulles. His note to Robert Bowie provided a long historical view of collective leadership, which he was convinced never worked. He cited the first and second Roman triumvirates and Napoleon as examples. According to Halle, while collective leadership had lasted so far, one-man rule would return to the USSR. He advised Bowie that the CIA would not admit this: in the absence of evidence the tendency was to “hold course.” Halle advised the administration to avoid any actions that could strengthen hardliners. He singled out liberation rhetoric as something that would inadvertently hurt any Soviet leader who advocated reduced tensions with the West, and admonished Bowie to remember that “[t]he future leadership of Russia could also be, at least in part, a product of our policy and tactics.”⁴² If presented as his own, Halle’s ideas would gain little traction because of the discord between he and Dulles.

For Bowie and the rest of the State Department, the longer-term changes through 1955 at the top of the Kremlin hierarchy were evidence of Khrushchev’s power. His position at the top, though, was hardly Stalinesque. DRS concluded that Khrushchev’s ascendance to the top marked the end of this period of flux but saw significant departures from previous Kremlin reshuffles. The restructuring after Stalin’s death took place quickly, and significantly, without mass violence or purges. Beria’s purge, while seemingly the exception to this rule, only resulted in the death of Beria and a few of his lackeys. DRS felt that because Malenkov’s dismissal was more accurately described as a demotion since he still held a position in the Presidium. The DRS asserted that these changes were overall the

⁴⁰ “Despatch: Walmsley to DeptState, No.441,” May 7, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 2, NARA.

⁴¹ “‘Tito-Khrushchev’, Beal to Voigt,” June 4, 1955, TCD, Reel 172, HL; “‘Bulganin Cover II’, Lambert to Gruin,” July 11, 1955, TCD, Reel 173, HL. Time correspondents had remarkably similar interpretations of Soviet Communism and its objectives, enough so that it seems that they genuinely agreed with Luce’s politics, or told their editors what they wanted to hear.

⁴² Halle to Bowie, September 4, 1955, Halle Papers, Box 1, Corres. Boo-Buz, UVSC.

result of policy differences exacerbated by personal rivalries. Most significant, though, was the overall lessening of police power and the abrupt end to glorification of Stalin and, indeed, even to the present leaders. The emphasis now, even after Khrushchev's ascendancy, was still on collective leadership.⁴³ Even if this was a façade, it was a stark departure from Stalinism nonetheless.

Despite the myriad interpretations of the leadership changes, there was remarkably little intelligence on which to base decisions. As such, Halle may have been correct about the CIA maintaining course. At the end of 1955 NIE-100 predicted that the leadership situation or the nature of the Soviet system was unlikely to change over the coming years; manoeuvring for power would continue, but it would be confined to the Kremlin and would not effect stability.⁴⁴ Such conclusions mattered. The idea in NIE-100 that a Stalin figure would re-emerge was premised on the conviction that nothing had changed in the Kremlin's manner of business. Conversely, acceptance of collective leadership meant a step away from Stalinism and reflected a mindset amenable to the recognition of further changes.

U.S. Debates about Soviet Policy and the Leadership Changes

The leadership question could have a significant impact on U.S. policy. It could tell the West something about Soviet intentions and objectives and whether they were changing. Soviet capabilities were often central to this debate. Much of the debate in the USSR in late 1954 and early 1955 had centred on the balance of light and heavy industry. In January the editor of *Pravda*, Dmitri Shepilov, whose position meant he was ideological whip, attacked those who supported light industry. Bohlen considered this a direct attack on Malenkov's policies.⁴⁵

⁴³ "IR-6945," May 20, 1955, RG59, BIR, Intel Reports on USSR and Eastern Europe 1942-1960, Box 22, IR-6945, NARA.

⁴⁴ NIE-100-7-55, November 1, 1955. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1990), 131-145.

⁴⁵ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1154," January 24, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

The question of the leadership and the direction of Soviet policy were tightly linked. Jacob Beam thought that given the current trend of Soviet policy no one would be surprised if the Soviets negated existing treaties with the UK and France.⁴⁶ Bohlen reported that the leadership changes appeared "to be [the] logical climax of deep-seated differences among top Soviet leadership on policy." Yet the U.S. should not focus solely on the heavy-versus-light industry debate in their examination of the meaning of the changes for U.S. policy. The greater issue was the future of Soviet economic development in general and its implications for foreign policy. The recent meeting of the Supreme Soviet seemed to confirm that the issue of heavy industry was critical. The appointment of Zhukov further supported this interpretation. Bohlen agreed with the prevalent idea at the time that Khrushchev's triumph meant a return to a tougher foreign policy, and even perhaps to Stalinist tactics.⁴⁷ The OIR also thought that Malenkov's replacement by Bulganin indicated the primacy of heavy industry.⁴⁸

If so, this would be a significant change. Ever since Stalin's death the attacks on the U.S. in the Soviet press had been reasonably constant. The amount of anti-American propaganda recently returned to the levels of the 'hate America' campaign of the Stalin era. It was difficult to know how much of this indicated a genuine shift towards greater hostility, and how much could be a way of justifying increased spending on heavy industry. Bohlen noted that this hardening of attitudes did not mean the Soviets would take actions that could initiate hostilities. In fact, the belligerent tone could benefit the West if it aided in the ratification of the Paris Accords. The best course of action would be for the U.S. not to give any post facto justification for the expected hostile stance.⁴⁹ This echoed earlier advice from Kennan and Halle that the best course for the U.S. was to forego any actions that could empower hardliners.

⁴⁶ "'Russian Peace', Lambert to Gruin," January 27, 1955, TCD, Reel 166, HL.

⁴⁷ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1278."

⁴⁸ "OIR Biographic Brief: 'Bulganin, New Soviet Premier...,'" February 8, 1955, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 1, Bulganin, N.A., 1 of 2, NARA.

⁴⁹ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1288," February 10, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

Bohlen's position that the U.S. could expect a tougher stance from Khrushchev was echoed by many press outlets, most prominently the *Boston Herald and Chicago Sun Times*. The *Baltimore Sun* went as far as to say that the Soviets would be tougher than ever before. The *Wall Street Journal* predicted a tough political game from Khrushchev, and thought that the leadership changes meant the regime was unstable. The *New York Times*, in contrast, viewed the possible increased role of the military as stabilising. Away from the *New York Times'* offices, Moscow based correspondent Harrison Salisbury took a different line, and emphasised that there could be tough words but the Soviets would still try to decrease tensions out of self interest.⁵⁰ Harrison's significant experience inside the USSR yielded a different conclusion than that of his colleagues in New York, who could only rely on their existing perceptions to interpret events. Interestingly, Salisbury and Bohlen frequently shared information on Soviet developments, but in this instance came to different conclusions about the direction of Soviet policy. They agreed, however, that the best course for the U.S. was to avoid any actions that could encourage Kremlin hardliners.

Time dispatches just before Malenkov's demotion expected a Soviet reversal towards heavy industry. For *Time* this indicated a tougher foreign policy, and a loss for those who supported the "staged" new course of emphasis on consumer goods.⁵¹ This meshed *with* *Time's* view of Khrushchev as a Stalinist who was leading the advocates of heavy industry back towards pre-eminence. *Time* also reported that it was difficult to know for sure who advocated the softer line towards the West, but if the U.S. thought it was Malenkov then "...we'd only be accepting what the communists want us to believe". This was consistent with the line *Time* had long parroted that there had been no change since Stalin's death. They once again asserted that despite all indications to the contrary that there had been no policy changes since 1953.⁵² However, all of this editorialising was largely conjecture, since with the exception of the *New York Times* none of these outlets

⁵⁰ "Daily Opinion Summary," February 10, 1955, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2533-1/3/55-July 29 1955, NARA.

⁵¹ "'Russian Peace', Lambert to Gruin."

⁵² "'Khrushchev IV', Beal to Williamson & Saint."

had correspondents in Moscow. Furthermore, the dispatches of those in Moscow were subject to Soviet censorship. Nevertheless, the State Department continually collected, analysed, and condensed the positions of the press for the consideration of those at the top of the department hierarchy. Public opinion mattered to Dulles.

The CIA steered a middle course after the announcement of Malenkov's dismissal. It argued that the power struggle was centred over economic policy, specifically the debate over light and heavy industry. A reversion to emphasis on heavy industry was likely. Bohlen initially agreed, emphasising that Khrushchev's primacy meant a return to a Stalinism- i.e., tougher, more militant domestic and foreign policies.⁵³ However, the CIA did not think this meant that consumer goods production would necessarily fall. Such a move would hurt Khrushchev's popularity and could turn Malenkov into a martyr with the Soviet people. Khrushchev, however, would take a more belligerent tone towards the U.S., even if this were only a way to conceal Soviet weakness.⁵⁴ The CIA thought that isolating the U.S. and weakening the Western alliance would be Khrushchev's foreign policy priorities.⁵⁵ This remained the same as it had been over the previous two years. The Germans, French, Belgians, and Dutch all concurred, indicating that the CIA was not coming to unreasonable conclusions, even if they were unenterprising.⁵⁶

The assertions of consistent Stalinist policy on the part of *Time* was a reflection of opinion in DRS- indeed, this was often the source of leaks that were the basis of their dispatches. But the CIA had a different perspective. It recognised real and "significant change in the USSR's economic policy occurred during 1953 and 1954 while Malenkov was Premier." There was a real, albeit marginal, increase in the proportion of the economy devoted to consumer goods while the emphasis on heavy industry remained constant. By 1954, there was greater

⁵³ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1278."

⁵⁴ "Shifts in Leadership and Policies in Moscow."

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "Cable: Dowling to Dulles, No.2278," February 9, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA; "Cable: Achilles to Dulles, No.3377"; "Cable: Alger to Dulles, No.705," February 11, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA; "Cable: Matthews to Dulles, No.1181," February 9, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

urgency in agricultural production. Though the shift towards consumer goods was not large in budgetary terms, nor did it greatly affect the amount spent on the military, the CIA nevertheless felt it was of great significance. As far as it could tell, the Central Committee approved this in September 1953.⁵⁷ If true, then it certainly had the backing of Khrushchev who became First Secretary of the CPSU at the same time. Therefore, when Bulganin announced the budget in February 1955 it was a departure from the previous two years; heavy industry was re-emphasised, consumer goods production scaled back, and defence spending rose. Agriculture retained its improved position, however. This was likely a result of Khrushchev's emergence as leader.⁵⁸

The CIA also saw the departure from Malenkov's policies as important for communist doctrine. This could affect U.S. security. Malenkov famously stated in 1954 that nuclear war would spell the end of civilisation. He quickly revised his position to say that it would only mean the end of capitalism. Yet this also reflected Malenkov's position on the inevitability of war. The CIA understood Malenkov as believing that nuclear weapons made war less likely due to mutual destruction. This was in contrast to Bulganin, who felt that war was still inevitable, and therefore continued to support spending on the military.⁵⁹ Clearly at one point the CIA had developed an image of Malenkov as the more level-headed leader. It emphasised his position in consumer goods and nuclear weapons, and the departures they represented from the positions of Stalin, to illustrate that there had indeed been a clear departure from pre-1953 positions during his time as Premier. As such, there was likely to be a reversion to more hard-line positions now that he was out, at least if the statements of Khrushchev and Bulganin prior to February 1955 were anything to go by.

The CIA quickly recognised its error, noting the flexibility of communist doctrine and foreign policy since Malenkov's demotion. The Austrian Treaty was

⁵⁷ "The Resignation of Malenkov" This report was more than 70 pages in length and represented a culmination of intelligence on all manner of Soviet affairs since 1953. It was also only relatively recently declassified in 2004.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

the first such example of this continuing flexibility. The emphasis on economic development in the Third World illustrated that there had been a departure from Stalinism, and not one that necessarily meant there would be more hostile bilateral relations. The CIA concluded that after Malenkov there would be "...a new course of action, characterized by the use of conciliatory deeds, and designed to regain the advantage in Europe which was lost when the Paris accords were drafted" and the "continuation of the long-term policy of conciliation toward the Sino-Soviet bloc's neighbors initiated soon after Stalin's death."⁶⁰ This conclusion was a bit muddled. The CIA seemed to have meant that conciliatory practices would be re-emphasised, rather than a "new course of action", since practices such as these were central to the peace offensive in the aftermath of Stalin's death. Indeed, this conclusion did more to show the continuity from 1953-55 in Soviet foreign policy more than anything else. Of course, there had been divisions in the Eisenhower administration about the course the Soviets were taking since 1953, and whether it represented a departure from Stalinism. The CIA seemed to think so, even if many others did not.

To be sure, a PPS report argued that substantive foreign policy changes toward reconciliation with the West would only be forthcoming once the Soviet leaders, whoever they were, felt secure in their position. Otherwise, the leaders could be attacked for softness toward the West. Yet this was entirely dependent on the person in charge being willing to negotiate. According to the PPS, if they were anything like Stalin, the West could expect little.⁶¹ This was precisely the point Kennan (and Bohlen and Halle) made to the CIA in February: the U.S. should be conciliatory, and cut the rug from beneath the hardliners.⁶² At the very least this would encourage spending on consumer goods, which might reduce the available resources for heavy industry and the military, thus reducing Soviet aggressive capabilities. Eisenhower and Dulles remained unreceptive to such actions.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ "Memo: Post-Stalin Soviet Policy, Leadership and Environment," May 24, 1955, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 99, S/P Record Copies, Jan-May 1955, 2 of 3, NARA.

⁶² "Memo: Changes in Soviet Leadership."

Khrushchev on Top- A New Threat or More of the Same?

Once Khrushchev's primacy in the Kremlin was clear Allen Dulles briefed the NSC that it was nevertheless difficult to tell if Khrushchev held anything like the power Stalin had.⁶³ Others outside the administration, such as Robert Tucker, were less circumspect and thought that a wholesale reversion to Stalinism was unlikely. There would be more emphasis on the military and heavy industry, but there would be more flexibility than there ever was under Stalin.⁶⁴

During his ascent to power Khrushchev often expressed doctrinaire positions on questions of ideology and his hostility to the West was outspoken. OIR traced Khrushchev's position on the Cold War back to the fact that he owed his present position to Stalin and the purges. His hard-line nature was the result of being a "ruthless lieutenant to Stalin" and this illustrated his true colours to OIR.⁶⁵ This interpretation was understandable; public statements of Soviet leaders formed a great deal of U.S. intelligence. Khrushchev's statements were often more bellicose than Malenkov's.⁶⁶ Unbeknownst to the U.S. Khrushchev was manoeuvring himself for power and was purposefully taking positions in opposition to Malenkov. Yet the inclination was to focus on what tended to reinforce existing perceptions. Khrushchev's hostility in many of his statements meshed with the perception of communism, and especially Stalinism, as innately expansionist. This was also often the case with other leaders. Even though Malenkov's record of advocating improved relations and emphasis on consumer goods seemed to reflect a changed Soviet manner many in the State Department still felt that nothing had fundamentally changed in the Soviet Union. The State Department's reaction to Malenkov's removal was to assume that there would be a *return* to Stalinism, implying that indeed there had been a change in style, if not in objectives. This, as much as anything, was a result of Khrushchev's blustery style and the positions he had taken in opposition to Malenkov. Although he was

⁶³ "Memo: 237th NSC Meeting."

⁶⁴ Beam to Barbour and Harvey, March 2, 1955.

⁶⁵ "OIR Intel Report: 'Khrushchev Reaches Top After Long, Steady Rise,'" February 17, 1955, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 1, Khrushchev, Nikita S., Feb-Oct 1955, NARA.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

careful to pay it the necessary heed in public, Khrushchev was characterised as not believing in peaceful coexistence. To him it merely meant the absence of war. As a result, the OIR described thought of him as rigid and unquestioning in his belief in communism.⁶⁷

Noting many of the same specifics of Khrushchev's rise as the OIR report, the CIA also found that the Party had been Khrushchev's vehicle for power, as it was Stalin's in the 1920s. The CIA also noted his emphasis on agriculture and its role in his increasing prominence, as well as his support for heavy industry in opposition to Malenkov. Echoing the OIR's comments on Khrushchev's use of Stalin's legacy, the CIA also noted how Khrushchev stressed his close relationship with Stalin in the autumn of 1954. Since Stalin's death the CIA characterised Khrushchev as energetic and dynamic, but also aggressive and demagogic. This also reflected the OIR's comments, though the CIA admitted that since Malenkov's downfall Khrushchev was more reserved.⁶⁸ All in all the image of Khrushchev as a doctrinaire Stalinist was built on very little hard intelligence. This consisted mostly of public statements, reports of those who met with him at receptions, and reports of the Soviet press. Naturally as both a Soviet and a communist Khrushchev made statements that were threatening to the U.S. These certainly did nothing to dispel the perception of him as a Stalinist. Events would soon unfold that would support this perception and further hamper a changed perception of Soviet Communism.

Disagreement over the Meaning of Soviet changes

Mirroring the controversy over the direction of Soviet foreign policy, there was long running disagreement over the significance of the changes in the USSR for U.S. policy. This had a number of implications for intelligence assessment and the way perceptions were formed of the Soviet Union. The dispute again centred on the question of a power struggle in the Kremlin. Indeed, whether Malenkov's

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "The Resignation of Malenkov."

fall was indeed the result of a 'power struggle' was debatable. In the wake of Malenkov's dismissal Bohlen reiterated to Dulles that the Moscow embassy found no evidence that personal rivalries were more influential than policy in the shakeup. Bohlen emphasized that the policy differences between the leaders seemed to be so deep that they could not simply be manoeuvres in struggle between personalities. To be sure, the emphasis on a 'power struggle' by the State Department was itself dangerous. For Bohlen, the emphasis on discovering the roots of such a struggle was distracting as there was very little the U.S. could ever learn about it. What mattered was the policy: personalities were only important insofar as they embodied specific policies. Bohlen thought that the current leaders learned the lessons of the 1920s well, and would not risk an open power struggle simply for the sake of power. If one were to erupt, it would be over genuine policy differences.⁶⁹ Bohlen certainly thought that a power shift occurred, but he vehemently disagreed with the DRS assessment that a violent power struggle to assume Stalin's mantle was taking place. Such an assertion was a "facile cliché" and he rejected the idea forwarded by DRS that Beria's arrest was the genesis a power struggle that raged ever since. The collective leadership was too stable for this.⁷⁰

The fundamental issue was the nature of the USSR after Stalin's death. Bohlen and the Moscow embassy as a whole felt that there had been significant changes, whereas the DRS and much of the State Department did not. DRS analysis in April 1955 prompted Bohlen to send withering criticism of DRS's conclusions to Walworth Barbour, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs. In it, Bohlen took aim at the DRS, and its head, Mose Harvey. The problem with the conclusions of the DRS was not the facts expressed, but their presentation. DRS was giving the impression that nothing had changed in the USSR and that Stalinism was alive and well. Questions asked in the paper, such as "[h]as Soviet policy changed in any fundamental way" were straw men.

⁶⁹ "Cable: Bohlen to Dulles, No.1359," February 22, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 1, NARA.

⁷⁰ "Letter: Bohlen to 'Wally' (Walworth Barbour)," April 2, 1955, RG59, Records of Charles Bohlen, Box 10, Personal Correspondence 1942-55, NARA.

Due to the fear in Washington of being soft on communism, the answers were foregone conclusions. This resulted in reports filled with 'safe' clichés rather than any real analysis. Indeed, DRS often implied that there had been no change.⁷¹ Location played a key role in the differences of opinion. Those in Moscow, such as Bohlen and others, were ahead of the curve in noticing the changes in the USSR. Now Bohlen was calling out the DRS for failing to even consider the changes.

Yet Bohlen was no Pollyanna. The fact that he recognised changes in the USSR did not mean that the West should relax its defence. But the U.S. *could* be more attuned to political developments. The rigidity of DRS analysis mean that it was unprepared to meet future Soviet changes or challenges. The DRS assertion that Soviet objectives and tactics remained the same as under Stalin was especially dangerous in this regard. Such a statement contained an element of truth, as indeed the expansion of communism remained an objective. However, those who were unfamiliar with Soviet affairs could think it meant there was *no* difference from 1953, thus obscuring the changes that occurred. Bohlen also took issue with the assertion that the Soviets would continue with "Cold War tactics". Again, it was not that Bohlen thought the statement was false, but rather that it could be interpreted differently. If the DRS meant that the state of affairs that had broadly existed between the USSR and West since 1917 would continue, then it was true. However, if the DRS were referring to the 1947-53 period, then it was objectionable. Bohlen slammed the DRS for seeing often noting the changes, but misinterpreting or rejecting them, noting that the changes post-Stalin:

...must be summed up as a visible attempt to return to diplomacy, to rejoin the world which Stalin's cold war had forced them to secede from. Every day brings new evidence in this field and the evident desire to reenter world trade; to reestablish cultural exchanges, sport connections, etc. (*sic*)⁷²

DRS could not simply dismiss the changes as non-existent.

Bohlen also alleged that DRS missed the subtleties of the changes in ideology and the greater trend of destalinisation calling DRS analysis "extremely

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. Emphasis added.

superficial” for underemphasising attacks on the cult of personality, and not realising that this was ultimately an argument in favour of collective leadership. Overall Bohlen viewed the DRS as rejecting, or at least minimising any changes in the USSR since Stalin’s death.⁷³ The reticence of DRS to contemplate change was longstanding, as the debate with the CIA over the Soviet economy in 1954 illustrated. To be sure, there were a number of possible reasons for this. Dulles’ demand for positive loyalty when he arrived at the State Department surely had a long shadow. Politically, not to mention practically, it was much safer to plan as if nothing had changed in the USSR. But Bohlen was not arguing that DRS should not consider such contingencies. Rather, he was urging it, and the State Department as a whole, to allow for the possibility of change in the USSR so the U.S. could better predict Soviet moves and prepare for all eventualities in a much more nuanced manner than the continued reliance on the stale concept of a Stalinist leadership or power struggle would allow.

Naturally, Mose Harvey could not let the matter rest. He retorted that DRS highlighted the decline of Malenkov over many months. It could not be accused of promoting the idea of a sudden or bloody power struggle. DRS had consistently reported myriad small changes in the USSR, but was criticised by the Moscow embassy for this since it gave the impression of an ongoing power struggle. This was in contrast the embassy view that short of a major crisis the leaders would not risk an open fight for power, as it would likely threaten the existence of the Soviet regime.⁷⁴ Harvey asserted that the Moscow embassy itself did not raise the possibility of a shift in power until December 17, 1954. This was untrue according to Bohlen, who highlighted cables that pointed to the rise of Khrushchev as early as May 1954.⁷⁵ Harvey in turn accused Bohlen of overemphasising the consumer goods programme and its permanency. Harvey did not think the changes presented a long-term change to the Soviet system since

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ “Letter: M Harvey to Bohlen,” April 15, 1955, RG59, Records of Charles Bohlen, Box 10, Personal Correspondence 1942-55, NARA.

⁷⁵ Ibid.; “Memo: Bohlen to Beam,” May 11, 1955, RG59, Records of Charles Bohlen, Box 10, Personal Correspondence 1942-55, NARA.

they could easily be reversed.⁷⁶ Indeed, as he had stressed to the CIA in 1954, Harvey argued that it was possible due to increases in overall efficiency and production, and thus an increase in consumer goods did not mean a reduction in heavy industry or military production. Harvey did not consider consumer goods alone as an indication of a more peaceful Soviet outlook.

The Bohlen-Harvey exchange dealt heavily with the nature of the power shifts in the Kremlin. Harvey said the embassy held the idea that it would take a major crisis to cause a change in the leadership. This led to debate over what such a crisis would entail. It was certainly true that Bohlen placed policy above personality or power as the major driver in the Kremlin. Harvey, however, did not think the Soviet system capable of serious “ninety degree” turns and that the real changes would be “two degree” turns. It was the culmination of these that mattered, and thus DRS had consistently highlighted them.⁷⁷ But was West German rearmament or the argument over light versus heavy industry not a ‘crisis’? Harvey did not say. However, Bohlen roundly rejected the accusation that he or the embassy had said that a crisis was necessary. Rather, Bohlen thought that Harvey was confusing dissention with division in the Soviet leadership, and thus creating the idea of a power struggle between the leaders where there was none. Indeed, Bohlen argued that the embassy had never thought that there would be “radical” or “sharp-turn” changes, but that within the limits of what could be expected of the Soviet leaders there could nevertheless be quite substantial change- and the DRS was not recognising it as such.⁷⁸

The argument was personal, and to non-specialists, pedantic. Nevertheless, it was a personification of the argument over the possibility and pace of change in the USSR and the defining features of the Soviet system since Stalin’s death. Bohlen offered a balanced summary:

DRS believes—and this letter confirms it—that the controlling factor in internal Soviet development has been a fight for power between Stalin’s successors to which domestic policies, particularly to the economic field,

⁷⁶ “Letter: M Harvey to Bohlen.”

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ “Memo: Bohlen to Beam.”

have played no part at all and as the letter makes plain, that collective leadership is a sort of temporary propaganda device while the battle is being fought. We at the embassy have never stated that collective leadership is eternal...We have stated, however...that the men running the Soviet Union are well aware of the danger of a genuine struggle for power to create another Stalin (which should not be confused with differences of opinion within the collective group) and have been making a genuine and not fictitious effort to operate the Soviet dictatorship more along the lines of the Leninist period.⁷⁹

This illustrated that Bohlen was ahead of the curve in his recognition of the change in the USSR. In this sense it was beneficial that Bohlen had been 'exiled' to Moscow, whereas if he were in Foggy Bottom he may have been slower to see these changes. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that he would have been as reticent or cautious as DRS. Bohlen had a long history of 'avant-gardism' in the State Department, especially with Dulles, with whom he had a rocky relationship. But the best evidence for Bohlen's continued recognition of the importance of the Soviet changes was the fact that he had urged the State Department to consider them since 1953.⁸⁰

Bohlen was critical of Harvey and DRS not for their consistent reporting of these changes, but for their implied conclusion that a power struggle was ongoing and could be expected to break out into the open at some point. Instead of hoping for such an event, the U.S. should instead pay heed to what the changes in the USSR meant for U.S. policy and investigate how these changes could benefit or hurt U.S. interests. This led to another problem: what exactly constituted a 'major change'? The Kremlin was an enigma and assigning a level of importance to changes in the Soviet system necessarily included a degree of speculation. While Dulles and Harvey insisted the changes were merely minor adjustments in order to divide the West of gain advantage, Bohlen clearly thought that a series of 'two degree' turns cumulatively meant a substantial change in course. Failure to scrutinise these changes was the worst thing the West could do.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ See chapter 1.

Chapter Conclusion

Efforts to ascertain who was most influential in the Kremlin mattered a great deal. The issue who held the most power could have serious implications for U.S. policy. The perceptions of policymakers were critical in interpreting the Kremlin power struggle. However, the reshuffle also represented a potential challenge to the existing perceptions of many in Washington. However, it was too early to yet form a consensus of what Khrushchev's ascent meant regardless of whether he would emerge as a 'new Stalin' or if he was part of a collective leadership.

However, what mattered was policy, and Bohlen was ahead of the curve in seeing and accepting the possibility of serious change in the USSR. This change necessitated a rethink of perceptions of the USSR and the intentions of its leaders. Failure to do so risked leaving the U.S. unprepared for further change in the Soviet Bloc or for any challenges that the new Soviet line presented. But the political climate and bureaucratic tendencies of Washington militated against recognising these changes. The greater political insulation of the CIA allowed it to go further than the State Department or White House in allowing for such a possibility. Nevertheless, the perception of the USSR as inherently conspiratorial, subversive and expansionist was too widespread and too deeply engrained in the minds of those with the most influence over policy. Furthermore, this perception had come to serve a purpose: it justified the U.S. posture in the Cold War as a defender of democracy, peace, and truth. The same image that many media outlets peddled. A new, liberalised Soviet Union would directly challenge this perception. It was also fraught with dangers- if the Soviets did indeed prove to be changing only out of tactical need, and then the U.S. could be in greater danger than before. Domestic politics were charged with anti-communism, and this in turn rested on the same image of Soviet Communism as subversive and essentially anti-American. Anyone who modified their perceptions or challenged the intellectual status quo was risking a great deal.

Chapter 4: Challenges to Existing Perceptions

A number of factors created resistance in the administration to ponder the changes taking place in the Kremlin. Chief among these was the engrained perception of the Soviets as incapable of change so long as they remained communists. This in turn was based on the view of Soviet Communism cultivated since 1917, but especially over the past decade. Yet other factors influenced the inaction of the administration: domestic political opinion and the relationship with U.S. allies. However, by the end of 1955 the beginnings of a change in perception of Soviet Communism would be apparent.

Domestic politics and the force of public opinion were part of the reason the Eisenhower administration did not take destalinisation seriously. Though McCarthy was a spent force by 1955, and the Democrats controlled both houses of Congress, it was still risky to treat the Soviet leaders with anything but suspicion.¹ Thus, anyone in the State Department or White House gave pause before advocating a line of action or change in perception of the Soviet leaders that required giving them the benefit of the doubt regarding the changes that had occurred in the Kremlin since Stalin's death.

Indeed the support voiced in the press over the actions and statements of Eisenhower and Dulles were in response to either their scepticism of Soviet changes, or their past handling of U.S.-Soviet relations. One poll in February 1955 gave Eisenhower a 5:1 approval rating for his handling of the Soviets, and another a 68 percent approval rating.² Indeed, if such an overwhelming majority of people approved of Eisenhower's past handling of the Soviets (characterised by intense scepticism, if not outright dismissal) there was little incentive to change course.

Public approval of Eisenhower and Dulles' past Soviet policies mixed with distinct pessimism about the durability of 'peace'. Most people thought that there would be a war with the USSR in the next two years.³ This should have been a catalyst for probing Soviet intentions or taking the changes in the USSR more

¹ A good account of McCarthy's downfall is: Caro, *Master of the Senate*, chap. 23.

² "OR: Popular Attitudes on Russia," February 23, 1955, RG59, OPOS, Box 45, Russia 1953-55, NARA; "Monthly Survey of American Opinion No.166," February 1955, RG59, OPOS, Box 12, Monthly Survey 1955, NARA.

³ "OR: Popular Attitudes on Russia"; "OR: Popular Opinion on the Soviet Union," April 22, 1955, RG59, OPOS, Box 45, Russia 1953-55, NARA.

seriously. Khrushchev's emergence as the most powerful of the Soviet leaders prevented this, especially as State Department reports often regarded Bulganin as a front man, while Khrushchev was expected to usher in a tougher foreign policy line. Others raised the possibility of Zhukov becoming a 'new Stalin', while still more thought that having the military involved more was a good thing as it promoted stability through the cautious and nationalistic nature of the army.⁴ In line with this commentary were the overwhelmingly positive comments in response to Dulles' speech in which he drew a distinction between Russian Communism and Russian Nationalists.⁵ The implication, that the U.S. had no problem with nationalism, played on the trope of the Soviets as having duped the Russian people into communism, and thus proved a popular line to repeat on Dulles behalf.

The Re-Emergence of Lenin

In Moscow, Bohlen and the embassy noted that the mention of Stalin's name was now taboo. The anniversary of his death went largely unnoticed. This theme would continue through 1955. *Pravda* used Lenin's works to support collective leadership. The embassy noted the omission of Stalin and emphasis on Lenin: it highlighted the importance that the image of collective leadership held for the Soviet leaders. The embassy noted as much.⁶ Later, The CPSU publicly criticised Stalinism. It praised collective leadership and condemned the cult of personality as "foreign" to Marxism-Leninism.⁷ Soviet specialists in Britain also noted the re-emergence of Lenin as a key doctrinal figure in the Kremlin. Isaac Deutscher wrote that Leninism was re-emerging in the Kremlin, especially with the idealisation of Lenin's work in Soviet life.⁸

Due to the political sensitivity of even allowing for change in the USSR, it was not surprising that some of the most innovative ways of exploiting destalinisation came from those outside the administration. An associate of CD

⁴ "Survey No.166"; "OR: Popular Opinion on the Soviet Union."

⁵ "Daily Opinion Summary," March 2, 1955, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2533-1/3/55-July 29 1955, NARA.

⁶ "Cable: Walmsley to DeptState, No.147," July 19, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 2, NARA.

⁷ "Despatch: Walmsley to DeptState, No.149," October 4, 1955, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

⁸ "Despatch: Chipman to DeptState, No.3542," May 27, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 2, NARA.

Jackson, JK Jessup, noted that Khrushchev's "Whistling Shrimp" speech made no references to Stalin. He suggested that the U.S. use the term 'Stalinist' to their advantage. The U.S. should label any policy of the Soviets that was incompatible with peaceful coexistence as 'Stalinist'.⁹ CD Jackson thought the idea was "terrific!" and forwarded the suggestion to Nelson Rockefeller, who had taken over as Special Assistant to the President for Psychological Warfare. Jackson told Rockefeller that Marx, Engels and Lenin were all part of Khrushchev's current vocabulary, but Stalin was conspicuously absent. Jackson pressed Rockefeller to use Jessup's 'Stalinist' angle. Thus:

[t]he division of Germany is a Stalinist division; the border of East Germany is a Stalinist border; the satellites are Stalinist prisoners. Such statements not only have the virtue of being true, but of putting Khrushchev and Company at least on the verbal defensive.¹⁰

Jackson's excitement to use the changes in the USSR to harry the Soviet leaders highlighted that he was very much aware of destalinisation. However, no one acted on his suggestions at the time, and the first instances of the administration using Stalinism for propaganda effect did not occur until after the 20th Party Congress.

Slowly Modifying Perceptions and Resistance to Change

In January 1955, NSC-5501 laid out that U.S. policy would be formulated on the assumption that Soviet hostility towards the West was unchanged and that the Soviet leaders would seek any advantage to spread Communism.¹¹ After Khrushchev and Bulganin emerged as the most prominent leaders (though not in equal measure), the State Department scrutinised the utterances of both men for indications of the future of Soviet policy. The Office of Soviet Affairs took all of Bulganin's statements from the Stalin period, and this only served to reinforce the perception of the Soviets as relentless expansionists who could not possibly deal

⁹ "Memo: JK Jessup to CDJ, Thompson, Elson, Miller, Roosenberg," September 21, 1955, CDJP, 1931-67, Box 91, Rockefeller, Nelson A., DDEL.

¹⁰ CDJ to Nelson Rockefeller, September 22, 1955, CDJP 1931-67, Box 91, Rockefeller, Nelson A., DDEL.

¹¹ "NSC-5501," January 7, 1955, FRUS 1955-57, vol.19, 24-39.

rationally with the U.S.¹² The State Department was studying the past so carefully that they were blind to the present.

The emphasis on Soviet history was much of the reason that the recent Soviet emphasis on peaceful coexistence was so concerning. Soviet history provided numerous examples of peace and coexistence being part of Soviet rhetoric during the Stalin era. Therefore, the awareness of history led the U.S. to view coexistence in its current incarnation as *more* dangerous than outright Soviet aggression. When estimating Soviet actions through 1959, the CIA reasserted the determination of the Soviet leaders to see communism triumph. Coexistence was a way to allow the Soviet military and economy time to grow, and such periods of strategic retreat were possible for communists before their ultimate victory. But this had no effect on the hostility of the leaders to capitalism or their willingness to see communism spread across the globe.¹³ Khrushchev, Bulganin and the other leaders would not be very good communists if they did not try to convert other nations to communism; they could hardly be expected to act otherwise. However, this was not a sentiment voiced in the administration.

Nonetheless, Allen Dulles stressed that Soviet foreign policy *was* changing. As it became clear that the Soviets would sign a treaty with Austria, Dulles thought it could hardly be a bluff and characterised such a move the most significant Soviet action since the end of the Second World War. It indicated a

¹² "Public Statements of Nikolai N. Bulganin," February 9, 1955, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 1, Bulganin, N.A., 1 of 2, NARA.

¹³ "'Soviet Capabilities and Probable Courses of Action Through Mid 1959,'" May 1, 1955, CREST, CIA-RDP67-00059A000100010002-7, NARA; Bulganin, N.A., 1 of 2, NARA. Ibid.; The media continued to play on the theme of communist danger because Soviet leaders still sought victory for themselves in the contest with the West. Upon the completion of his much-trumpeted visit to the USSR at the beginning of 1955, William Randolph Hearst Jr. opined that "[c]ommunism's ultimate goal remains world domination and the Russian leaders are sure they will someday achieve it." The Soviet desire for peace was only the result of a need for peace due to Allied military superiority rather than any innate pacifism on the part of the Soviet leaders. According to Hearst's logic, it was not the Soviet leaders that changed of their own accord, but the outside world that moulded a more reasonable Soviet Union. He concluded that Eisenhower's policy of "firmness without provocation" was the best course and was indeed bearing fruit. If the fruit in question were the changes witnessed in the USSR in the past years, i.e., in the form of less aggression and a more flexible foreign policy, Hearst seemed to be echoing the sentiments of Dulles that the changes were the result of Western policies rather than anything inside the USSR itself. Yet he came to a different conclusion than Dulles had so far, stating that the U.S. should meet new flexible Soviet foreign policy challenge with a programme of "'competitive co-existence' with the Communists in every field and on every front"[sic]. Hearst neglected to elaborate what exactly this would entail, but it certainly sounded much like the psychological warfare that much of the Eisenhower administration was advocating. The idea of "competitive co-existence" against the Soviets was something that was hard to disagree with, especially in the face of the alternative. Implementation, however, was something different entirely. WR Hearst Jr, "'Report on Russia-Uncensored!'"

growing flexibility on the part of the Soviet leaders. This new accommodation on the part of the Soviets opened up greater risks for their hold over the Satellites.¹⁴ But an Austrian Treaty also held the possibility of creating a neutralist bloc in the centre of Europe. This, according to Dulles, combined with the diplomatic charm offensive that was well underway, was part of a larger effort to prevent German rearmament.¹⁵

The changes in Soviet Communism were slowly becoming increasingly clear to the State Department. DRS admitted that power akin to Stalin's was no longer possible in the USSR. This was a significant departure from its previous position. In the wake of the Khrushchev-Bulganin trip to Belgrade DRS leaked to *Time* that the Soviet leaders must have concluded that the brand of international communism that Stalinism represented was no longer possible. Hence, the new leaders sought to reconcile themselves and the Soviet system to this new reality.¹⁶ If DRS thought that the Soviet leaders had adapted then this implied that they themselves recognised the changes in the USSR since Stalin's death.

Yet DRS' recognition of change was convoluted. After assuming never-ending hostility on the part of the Soviets for so long, perceptions did not change quickly. DRS accepted some of the changes in the USSR. However, it also stressed that the changes were only for the benefit of the Soviets themselves and that they remained hostile to capitalism. This was ridiculous: no one could expect the Soviets to make changes for the benefit of the West, or cease their hostility towards capitalism- lest they cease being communists. Indeed, the position of the State Department reflected Foster Dulles' conviction that the Soviet mission to Belgrade was the result of U.S. pressure to bring West Germany into NATO. Nevertheless, there was a recognition that the relaxation in tensions that was occurring could be to the benefit of the U.S.¹⁷ This was a stark departure from the previous DRS position that tensions between the U.S. and Soviet Union, whether in the form of the Soviet emphasis on peace or in the diplomatic charm offensive, were crafted solely to undermine the West. Ultimately Eisenhower and Dulles

¹⁴ "Memo: 245th NSC Meeting," April 21, 1955, AWF, NSCS, Box 6, DDEL Dulles made a point of indicating that Bohlen agreed with this interpretation.

¹⁵ "Memo: 248th NSC Meeting," May 12, 1955, AWF, NSCS, Box 6, DDEL.

¹⁶ "'Tito-Khrushchev', Beal to Voigt."

¹⁷ "'US-USSR', Beal to Williamson," June 9, 1955, TCD, Reel 172, HL.

thought that the new flexibility on the part of the Soviets could offer more opportunities, but crucially did not mean the Soviets had given pursuing victory.

As *Time* explained in an American football analogy:

A passing game in football carries danger as well as desperation. One of those long spirals might connect...The mistake, however, is to conclude that by aborting a passing technique the opposition has given up hope of winning the game.¹⁸

There was now recognition of change in the USSR. The issue was how various parts of the Eisenhower administration interpreted these changes. The CIA stated that although there had been changes in Soviet tactics there had been no change to basic Soviet hostility towards the West. Therefore, it was not foreseen that the Soviets would settle any major issues, and certainly not if they involved concessions to the West.¹⁹ As a result, the administration either dismissed Soviet conciliatory gestures, or if it accepted them, only with the caveat that they were only acting for their own benefit. As the response to the Soviet visit to Belgrade demonstrated, any recognition of changes in the Soviet Union were accompanied by the statement that the Soviets were still trying to 'win'.

The report of the Quantico Vulnerabilities Panel made it clear that the desire of the Soviets to meet (in Geneva) "...cannot be traced to a genuine interest on their part to ease any tensions for the sake of peace and harmony. It must be traced to a specific Communist interest in improving the Soviet position in the international struggle for power" and that "the objective of the Soviet Union is to convert or conquer the world".²⁰ It concluded that if the U.S. went to Geneva with the purpose of reducing tension it would only strengthen the position of the Soviets. U.S. policy goals were essentially the same as these, but this missed the panel entirely. The PPS also evaluated the situation. It quoted Eisenhower that "there is a change going on" in the USSR, but came to no firm conclusions. Though the PPS acknowledged that some experts denied any real changes, one PPS staff member, LW Fuller, was convinced otherwise and expressed this to Bowie. Though Lenin and Stalin had rather loosely interpreted Marxist doctrine

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ "National Intelligence Digest (Section on 1953-55)," May 1, 1955, CREST, CIA-RDP67-00059A000100010002-7, NARA.

²⁰ "Report of Quantico Vul. Panel," June 10, 1955, RoP, WHCF, CF, 1953-61, Box 63, Russia (6), DDEL; "Quantico Vulnerabilities Panel Report, Appendix D," June 10, 1955, RoP, WHCF, CF, 1953-61, Box 63, Russia (7), DDEL.

when needed, the current Soviet leaders were now shaping policy around developments rather than dogma. Fuller found it hard to deny that there had been a significant change over the past years, most recently with the conclusion of an Austrian treaty. Crucially, Fuller indicated that the Russian Revolution had now become 'middle aged'. Although the worldview of the Soviet leaders still derived from Marxism, zealotry was in decline. These changes were happening at the upper echelons of the Soviet system, and hardly seemed to be the result of personality clashes. They were too widespread for this. Fuller did not think that it mattered so much who was in charge, and cited the Moscow embassy in support: "our general concern...is not who runs the Soviet Union, but where it is headed."²¹

Bohlen told the NSC that he had tried to get the State Department to study the differences between dictatorship and collective leadership. Bohlen thought the results would be illuminating as collective leadership implied a reliance on institutions. Such institutions became more important and took on formal roles. One example was the army, which had become more akin to the JCS in the U.S. Yet Bohlen asserted that "...circumstances have [changed]- Stalin has died. They are trying to give their regime some stability...[t]he period of adjustment after Stalin's death has not yet finished."²² Bohlen was making a very fine distinction between the men involved in the Kremlin and their objectives. He was arguing that though the men involved were the same that had worked under Stalin, their tactics, and even their objectives, had altered. Bohlen rejected the assertions of many in the State Department, White House, and press that Soviet attempts to improve relations were part of a larger strategy to subvert the West. He stressed that "[t]he Soviets are not engaged in a gigantic Machiavellian plot to lull people to sleep."²³ Bohlen deduced that the Soviets felt that improved relations would net better returns than continued mistrust and hostility.

²¹ "Memo: Fuller to Bowie," June 13, 1955, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 98, USSR, 2 of 2, NARA; Outside Washington, the feeling was that significant changes were afoot. The London embassy pouched back articles by Edward Crankshaw of *The Observer*. He thought that the Soviets were making many of changes the West demanded and the West should not fail to recognise these. They represented a chance for the West to engage in "active co-existence". The Foreign Office held a similar position: the changes could lead to a lessening of tension and possibly Soviet concessions, if the West engaged in real negotiations instead of Cold War posturing. "Despatch: Chipman to DeptState, No.3782," June 23, 1955, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 2, NARA.

²² "Remarks of Bohlen to NSC Planning Board," July 8, 1955, WHO, NSC Staff Papers, 1953-61, Special Staff File Series, Box 8, War Objectives, DDEL.

²³ Ibid.

Indeed, Bohlen did not think that the Soviet leaders were necessarily the problem: communism was. He pointed out that since 1917 whenever Soviet interests and the interests of international communism have conflicted, the latter always won. Consequently:

China is far more dangerous to us today than the USSR. USSR has expanded virtually to the limits of traditional Russian ambition...[b]ut China hasn't. Further, China is still "in the marijuana period" ideologically. It still believes the myths of Communism. The Soviets have sobered.²⁴

Bohlen was asserting that the Soviets no longer followed their own ideology. The feeling that the Soviets had settled down from their 'teenage years' echoed the remarks of Fuller. Just as Fuller recognised that the methods of the Soviet leaders were changing, so did Bohlen in his assessment of the Satellites. Without Stalin and his reliance on force, the Soviets would likely grant greater autonomy.²⁵ Bohlen acknowledged that destalinisation was creeping into foreign policy. Given the greater demands the satellites, the leadership realised they had to grant greater economic and political freedom since they were unwilling to crush dissent.

Dulles, however, was still resistant to admitting the changes in the USSR could be to the benefit of the U.S. Although he admitted that the establishment of diplomatic relations between the FRG and the USSR was a major practical step from previous Soviet positions, he told Adenauer that there could be nothing but "ceaseless conflict" with international communism; its "limitless objectives" could only be interrupted by "tactical pauses". Over the past years the U.S. had seen various changes on the part of the Soviet leaders take precedence temporarily but "current Soviet policies are evidently directed towards disguising the features of militant communism."²⁶ Clearly the assertions of Bohlen since 1953, and most recently to the NSC that the Soviets were not engaged in a "Machiavellian" peace

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ JFD to Adenauer, October 3, 1955, EDP, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 1, ML; Adenauer wrote to Dulles that the Soviets still were working toward the victory of communism, but were intent on peace for the moment in order to give greater emphasis to "other tasks". Adenauer realised that such a "cold peace" could lead to higher living standards and internal changes in the USSR that may make it less dangerous. This appreciation of the Soviet desire for peace and the benefits it may have for the West was significant. Whereas in 1953 Adenauer was adamant that the Soviet talk of peace was a ruse to divide the West, he now accepted that the Soviets had a genuine need for peace. Adenauer to JFD, December 12, 1955, EDP, Series 5, Box 2, Folder 1, ML.

plot had no effect on Dulles' perceptions as they reflected the assumptions made about Soviet intentions in NSC 5501.²⁷

In the wake of the Geneva Summit, Park Armstrong wrote to Dulles with his conclusions about Soviet policy:

...since Stalin's death, and especially since early 1955, the Soviet leaders have been increasingly active in seeking a gradual reduction of international tensions...The nature of these motivations suggests that current Soviet policy is more than a short-term tactical shift, but its duration will probably be pragmatically determined.²⁸

This was the second instance of a Washington based State Department officer supporting such a view. Dulles now had the State Department assistant for intelligence and a PPS member supporting the position of Bohlen that the Soviet shift in policy was neither short term nor tactical. This shift in thinking was finally beginning to affect him. After Geneva he acknowledged that the Austrian Settlement and entry of the FRG into NATO meant the Soviets were in a "less menacing" position. Much of this he credited to U.S. policies. But he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that:

I think we are getting to a relationship [where] we can deal with [the Soviet Union] on a basis comparable to that where we deal with differences between friendly nations. We have differences, and they are hard differences, but we know they will not lead to war.²⁹

This was a significant public statement. As will be shown in later chapters, Dulles openly accepted the change that destalinisation represented, but only in a very cautious manner. Yet by late 1955 he was even willing to speak to Congress about the shift in Soviet demeanour. This is notable given his weariness of Congressional opinion. Yet when NIE-100 was published in November its basic conclusions were much as the same as NSC-5501 in January. Although there had been:

...[a] pronounced change in Soviet tactics, we see no indication that the USSR has given up its long-range aim of achieving a Communist-dominated world...What they apparently have decided is that the existing world situation requires a shift from the previous line if they are to make progress toward the ultimate aims.³⁰

²⁷ NSC-5501, January 7, 1955, Glennon, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19*, 24-39.

²⁸ "Memo: Armstrong to SecState," October 14, 1955, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

²⁹ Dulles quoted from: Ronald Pruessen, "John Foster Dulles and the Predicaments of Power," in *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War*, ed. Richard Immerman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 35.

³⁰ NIE 100-7-55, November, 1 1955, Glennon, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19*, 131-145.

Yet herein lay the issue: neither Bohlen nor Fuller nor anyone else denied that the Soviets had given up on communism. Refusing to consider alterations to U.S. policy on the basis that the Soviets remained communists was either a short-sighted and shallow conclusion, or a transparent way of preventing any change in U.S. policy. What mattered was how the Soviets were acting on the world stage, and this had most definitely changed.

The fact that NIE-100 maintained the line of the Eisenhower administration towards the USSR that it had held since 1953 is not surprising. Indeed, with perceptions of the Soviets and their methods only beginning to change it would have been unlikely that those who held such shifting views would have pressed them so firmly as to be expressed in an NIE. Rather it should be noted that the acceptance of change in the USSR was gaining traction, even with Dulles.

The Shift to 'Peaceful Coexistence'

The Soviet shift towards 'peaceful coexistence' represented an incremental change in the overall Soviet use of 'peace' as a weapon against the West in the Cold War. CD Jackson wrote to Eisenhower regarding the persistent and skilled use of 'peace' by the new Soviet leaders. According to Jackson, most people realised that Soviet claims of peace were bogus, but repeated often enough; some of it did "rub off". He also pointed out that due to the danger posed by Soviet expansion the U.S. had unwittingly contributed to Soviet peace propaganda through its own defence build-up. The only logical response to such Soviet aggression was military preparedness. This perversely contributed to the success of Soviet peace propaganda: "while the Soviets were capitalizing on the repetition of the symbols of peace while actually waging war, we were forced to capitalize on the symbols of war while actually trying to preserve the peace."³¹ Jackson noted that there was little that could be done to rectify the discrepancy at this point: the Soviets had effectively monopolised anything related to 'peace': everything from Picasso and his "peace dove", to petitions and peace campaigns were all Soviet creations and their use by anyone else was now tainted.³²

³¹ "CD Jackson to Eisenhower," April 9, 1954, SAP, Box 8, Folder 10, BL.

³² Ibid.

The PPS was aware of 'peaceful coexistence' as a Soviet tactic since 1924.³³ So it was no surprise that when 'peaceful coexistence' became established in 1954 the press regarded it at best with extremely guarded optimism, and at worst as the newest form of a Kremlin peace trick that would undermine the West. The danger again was in the form of 'soft tactics' that could lead allies to adopt neutralist positions.³⁴ Yet the Soviets were giving peaceful coexistence more backing than peace offensives under Stalin ever did. Bohlen took notice when *Kommunist* actively altered the meaning of peaceful coexistence. *Kommunist* downplayed the differences between communism and capitalism while continuously citing how communist doctrine supported peaceful coexistence. It even went as far as to claim that the USSR had never tried to export revolution and had no plans to do so in the future.³⁵ The article specifically rejected the idea that the Soviet emphasis on peaceful coexistence was "Soviet propaganda", a "communist myth", a "trick" or "bait for public opinion or [a] temporary tactic".³⁶

Bohlen told Dulles the article was the "most authoritative statement on this subject of the post-Stalin period". He acknowledged that *Kommunist* did not directly confront Marx's doctrine that capitalism inherently bred war.³⁷ Nevertheless, the fact that the Soviets were seeking to buttress peaceful coexistence by publicly seeking a loophole in communist doctrine was significant. The Soviets were trying to convince sceptical fellow communists of the correctness of the changed Soviet line. But it was also aimed at Western policymakers. The Soviet leaders could only hope they would interpret it as a sign of Soviet peaceful intentions. But this was bungled when *Kommunist* took a swipe at 'liberation' rhetoric.³⁸

Dulles remained silent on the article, and the consistency of U.S. policy in the coming months indicated that the article was understood as a way to give a phony peace campaign more credibility and provide an interlude while Soviet

³³ Richard Davis, "General Estimate of Current Soviet Objectives and Policies in Foreign Affairs," January 31, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 113, S/P Working Papers, April 1956, 2 of 2, NARA.

³⁴ "National Intelligence Digest (Section on 1953-55)."

³⁵ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState," September 18, 1954, RG59, CDF, 761.00, Box 3813, Untitled folder, NARA.

³⁶ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState," September 23, 1954.

³⁷ *Ibid.*; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState," September 18, 1954.

³⁸ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState," September 23, 1954.

power increased. Allen Dulles saw the transition towards peaceful coexistence as due to the realisation by the collective leadership that that the success of communism globally remained a long-term goal. Therefore a period of coexistence was necessary.³⁹ Peaceful coexistence saw a different use when Khrushchev and Bulganin replaced Malenkov in January 1955. Both men went to pains to stress peaceful coexistence, though Khrushchev's statements were generally seen as emphasizing Soviet strength as well, in contrast to Bulganin's, which were more conciliatory. This 'good cop, bad cop' routine was broadly consistent through 1955. After the Geneva Conference Khrushchev and Bulganin were careful not only to stress peaceful coexistence, but also and consistently buttressed their peaceful proclamations with those expressing Soviet strength, attacking colonialism and their fundamental trust in communism.⁴⁰ Such a tactic only furthered doubts about the sincerity of the peace offensive.⁴¹

A Glacial Shift in Perceptions?

The shift towards the consistent use of 'peaceful coexistence' on the part of the Soviets did little to change the view held by Dulles, Eisenhower and the intelligence establishment that the switch was lipstick on a pig. Eisenhower had long since concluded that the Soviet threat was fundamentally based on political and psychological elements. Peaceful coexistence was a hallmark of this strategy.⁴² But since Eisenhower conceived of the Cold War as ideological at heart, this did not lessen the Soviet threat. Rather it made it more difficult to contain since it was harder to repulse an enemy who was attempting to spread its ideology through 'peace'. In January 1955 NSC-5501 summarized the peace offensive as "the most effective tactic for dividing the free world and isolating the U.S. from its allies". It

³⁹ Paper Prepared by the DCI, November 18, 1954, Slany, *FRUS: 1952-1954, Vol. 2, 778*.

⁴⁰ "Memo: Armstrong to SecState," December 13, 1955, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 14, Soviet Interests, etc., NARA; Jeffery Books makes a similar point regarding the period immediately after Stalin's death: the Soviet leaders wanted to stress a break with the past, but also needed legitimacy. This led to their rhetoric of change and peace being expressed in distinctly Stalinist terms, thus rendering it null. See: Brooks, "Stalin's Ghost"; According to Vladislav Zubok, the apparent "zig-zag" of Soviet foreign policy and rhetoric was due to the need for change, which had to be expressed through the Stalin cult and official ideology in order to maintain the support of the Soviet elite. See: Vladislav Zubok, "Soviet Policy Aims at the Geneva Conference, 1955," in *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2000).

⁴¹ The relationship between peaceful coexistence and the Third World is addressed in Chapter 9.

⁴² Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 70.

would require a major undertaking for the U.S. to maintain the same level of unity in the face of the new, peaceable, Soviet line.⁴³

In January 1955 Foster Dulles slammed the use of peace in Soviet foreign policy. He thought the Soviet version of peace was a perversion that would be achieved by extending a state of conformity and submission to a dictatorship. Relying on his interpretation of Soviet Communist doctrine, Foster Dulles went on to say that the Soviets realized that war would be necessary, but they hoped that the peace offensive would win as many to their side as possible before force would be necessary.⁴⁴ Allen Dulles echoed his brother when he briefed the NSC in May 1955 on the danger the Soviet 'soft line' and the goal of creating a 'neutralist bloc' in Europe.⁴⁵ The conclusion that the Soviets were out to undermine Western unity and undermine its military preparedness could only have caused the U.S. to further doubt Soviet 'peace' sincerity.

In the run-up to the Geneva Summit in July 1955 the prevailing attitude towards the Soviet peace offensive was that it did not mean any greater change in Soviet objectives but was rather a ploy to divide the west and gain breathing space to take care of domestic issues. Even if this was actually a fairly accurate interpretation of Soviet intentions,⁴⁶ the Eisenhower administration failed to discern any other changes in the USSR since the peace offensive was either interpreted within existing perceptions of Soviet communist intentions, which confirmed the Soviets as subversive and hostile, or were dismissed as tactical changes, which also confirmed malign intentions. The Geneva Summit therefore became a battleground of peace propaganda, with Eisenhower's 'Open Skies' proposal countering Soviet disarmament offers.⁴⁷ Eisenhower could have been

⁴³ NSC-5501, January 7, 1955, Glennon, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19*, 29-30.

⁴⁴ "'The Peace We Seek,'" January 11, 1955, ELDP, Box 42, JFD Speeches 1955, DDEL. Dulles had clearly disregarded Bohlen's cables regarding Soviet attempts to reconcile the peace campaign with the inevitability of war.

⁴⁵ "Memo: 248th NSC Meeting."

⁴⁶ Gunter Bischof and Saki Dockrill, eds., *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2000), 6; Regarding what Soviet intentions actually were vis-à-vis the peace offensive, see: Zubok, "Soviet Policy Aims at the Geneva Conference, 1955."

⁴⁷ John Prados, "Open Skies and Closed Minds," in *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2000), 229; A general overview of how Geneva fit into the progression of US-Soviet relations during the Eisenhower Administration can be found in chapters 5 and 6 of: Victor Rosenberg, *Soviet-American Relations, 1953-1960: Diplomacy and Cultural Exchange During the Eisenhower Presidency* (London: McFarland, 2005); See also: Richard Immerman H., "The United States and the Geneva Conference of 1954: A New Look," *Diplomatic History* 14, no. 1 (1990): 43-66.

sincerely interested in peace, but was also trying to score propaganda points. In this instance, the Open Skies proposal derailed the Soviet peace offensive by making the U.S. look peaceful and the Soviets intransigent.⁴⁸

After the summit there was little change in how the Eisenhower administration perceived the peace offensive and Soviet objectives. In preparation for the Geneva Foreign Ministers meeting in October, Dulles remained convinced that the Soviet turn towards conciliation was a result of the failure of Soviet tactics, and that it was the success of Western unity that caused this. The U.S. had to remain vigilant and committed to collective security.⁴⁹ This was the same position he advocated since 1953. Yet Dulles also stated that “[w]e must not rebuff a change which might be that for which the world longs.”⁵⁰ Indeed, in one of the first indications that Dulles acknowledged serious change in the USSR he thought:

... it is possible that what the Soviet rulers design as a maneuver may in fact assume the force of an irreversible trend. Our own conduct should be to encourage that to happen.⁵¹

In the wake of the Geneva Foreign Ministers meeting, NIE-100 recognised the role that Stalin’s death played in changing Soviet foreign policy, acknowledging that the new leaders desired a reduction in tensions, but only as a way to reduce the Western defence effort and divide Western allies.⁵² Indeed, although NIE-100 noted a “pronounced change in Soviet tactics”, there had been no indication of any change in the ultimate Soviet objective of a communist dominated world. The new peaceful coexistence strategy created problems for the Western alliance: indications were that it would last for some time, and combating *less* hostility from the Soviets was more challenging than responding to overt

⁴⁸ Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 184–185, 188–189, 194.

⁴⁹ “Preparations for the October Meeting of the Foreign Ministers,” August 15, 1955, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 94, Foreign Policy, NARA. The document was drafted by Dulles and approved by Eisenhower.

⁵⁰ Gaddis, *Strategies*, 139. Gaddis thought this proved that Dulles was willing to put national interests above his ideological convictions; Gaddis also argued that Dulles viewed destalinisation as a threat to European integration and NATO, two projects very close to his heart, but follows this by acknowledging that Dulles took the changes in the Kremlin very seriously, but still remained opposed to negotiations even after the Geneva summit. This appears contradictory, but what it highlights- even though Gaddis fails to mention- was that Dulles was clearly grappling with his long established perceptions of the Soviet leaders in the face of increasing evidence of change in the Kremlin. See: *Russia, the Soviet Union and the United States: An Interpretive History*, 2nd ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1990), 222–224.

⁵¹ “Preparations for the October Meeting of the Foreign Ministers.”

⁵² NIE-100-7-55, November 1, 1955, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19*, 132–133.

aggression.⁵³ Defence build-ups were a nonsensical response to this specific threat, and played into Soviet propaganda by making the West appear as a warmonger. This could sway many neutral countries towards the Soviet camp. Western nations that undertook defence build-ups and alliances could find these commitments hard to justify in the face of apparent Soviet peaceful intentions. All of this could lead to perhaps the most damaging result of 'peaceful coexistence': blurring the lines between the communist and non-communist world.⁵⁴ This would lead to a fundamental danger to the U.S.: the Soviets could rely on force inside the bloc to maintain cohesion; the U.S. had to rely on persuasion. After the Geneva Foreign Ministers meeting Bowie emphasised to Dulles the danger of the Soviet position. The conspicuous avoidance of menacing attitudes was crafted to make allies doubt the need for collective security.⁵⁵ Bowie thought that the success of the Geneva Conference in lowering tensions actually put the West at a disadvantage. In combination with an emphasis on peaceful coexistence, lowered tensions left the West even more exposed to Soviet political warfare attacks, especially those emphasising 'peace'. However, this ran up against the established imperative of maintaining the image of the Soviets as the aggressor that underpinned so many of the administration's Cold War assumptions.

Publicly Dulles put an optimistic spin on altered Soviet tactics. Although he often emphasized the danger they posed he told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the revised Soviet emphasis on peaceful coexistence proved that Western policies were working, rather than Soviet policies being flawed. According to Dulles, for the past 30 years the Soviet system was based on violence and intolerance of other systems and he cited Stalin's assertion "that anyone who did believe in the policy of violence either did not understand Soviet communism, or had gone out of his mind." But doctrinal changes such as various roads to socialism and the lessening reliance on violence caused the Soviet leaders to "...throw out of the Soviet Union what has been their Bible for the last 25 or 30 years" and proved that "...the unity and firmness and resolution of the free nations during the past few years have caused Soviet policy to fail, and today they

⁵³ Ibid., 137-141.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 144.

⁵⁵ Robert Bowie, "Memo: U.S. Post-FM Policy," December 23, 1955, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 94, Foreign Policy, NARA.

are trying to figure out how they are going to get a better one." Dulles actually regarded the changes as bringing the Soviet system closer to the American one.⁵⁶

Ever since Stalin's death Dulles had rejected the possibility of change, but now he was treading a fine line. It was crucial that he maintain the sense of danger posed by the revised Soviet tactics, especially the peace offensive, while also stressing that the revisions were the result of Western policies of collective security and rearmament. This was Dulles' way of rationalising the situation to his advantage; he acknowledged the changes in the Soviet system, but in a way that emphasised the danger they posed and that underlined that it was U.S. led resistance to Soviet expansion that had caused the changes in the first place. Such hedging also prevented him from being attacked as soft on communism. All of this meant the U.S. should hold course.

Dulles' testimony displayed his lawyerly ability to convince himself of seemingly contradictory positions. He acknowledged sweeping changes in the Soviet system: "...I wrote this in my book of six years ago- the most significant thing that would happen would be if they would begin to teach in the Soviet Union something different from the Stalinist doctrine..." Indeed, Dulles suggested that present developments could be so important that they may not be appreciated for a decade or more.⁵⁷ Perhaps Dulles was somehow referring to the glacial pace it had taken him to admit in public that his own mindset had indeed changed, since after three years of denying any change in the Soviet Union, he was now admitting, on the record, a shift in Soviet policy of first-rate importance. Befuddlingly, though, he also specifically *denied* the suggestion that his outlook on Soviet Communism had changed at all in the past three years, stating he took "...some satisfaction in going back to some of the things I wrote ten or five years ago, and they seem to me to be the about the same things I believe in now."⁵⁸

The PPS agreed with Dulles interpretation that while Soviet tactics had changed since Stalin's death, the fundamental objectives remained. The Austrian

⁵⁶ "Dulles Transcript Highlights', McConaughy to Williamson," February 25, 1956, TCD, Box 1, Folder 12, HL Yet Dulles stressed that the danger at the moment was from "competitive coexistence". This variant of "peaceful coexistence" underscored the combination of doctrinal changes such as various roads to socialism, economic aid and trade, and of course a trumpeting of "peace", in order to appeal to the Third World.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

treaty, Yugoslav rapprochement, Geneva Summit, and Soviet tour of Asia were only undertaken as part of the larger campaign to promote a 'softer' Soviet image that was to their advantage. Projecting an image of peace was good for the Soviets: smiles were better at undermining the West than scowls. But for the PPS, this change had been a result of European collective security, of which the U.S. was deeply involved.⁵⁹ An ulterior motive was always suspected of the Soviets.

A specific concern in Washington was that the Soviet peace offensive would undermine European unity and defence. Adenauer agreed, and warned against the dangers of 'peace'. Dulles and Adenauer shared similar conceptions of the communist menace, and both felt the current Soviet tactics were transitory.⁶⁰ Adenauer had little faith in the Western public to see the danger the Soviets posed:

The masses in the free countries who influence public opinion strongly have no clear idea on communism...[t]hey know nothing about it and they live in a feeling of security that is wholly unjustified... it is an essential task to inform our peoples on this: what communism teaches... [and] what happened to the people which it has subjugated.⁶¹

The woolly naïveté that Adenauer ascribed to the Western public made Soviet peace pronouncements extremely dangerous. He insisted that no one should be "taken in" by it. The inclination to say, "'after all, the Russians are not so bad'" was "contagious" and "led to some disturbing and destructive consequences in Europe."⁶² Whereas Dulles thought that the West had been successful in maintaining unity, Adenauer thought Soviet peace tactics were successful doing the opposite. At the moment the danger was from the Soviet backslapping, "...keep smiling approach".⁶³ But domestic U.S. politics also concerned Adenauer. He feared the neo-isolationists in Congress as much as he did the Soviet army or communist movements in Europe.⁶⁴ The combination of American isolationist tendencies along with the peace offensive posed serious security problems for the FRG and *Westbindung*. As a result, Dulles could not

⁵⁹ Richard Davis, "General Estimate of Current Soviet Objectives and Policies in Foreign Affairs."

⁶⁰ Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Konrad Adenauer: A German Politician and Statesman in a Period of War, Revolution, and Reconstruction*, vol. 2 (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1995), 38-45; "Speech: Adenauer to CFR," June 14, 1956, CFRP, Box 446, Folder 4, ML.

⁶¹ Adenauer to JFD, December 12, 1955.

⁶² "Speech: Adenauer to CFR."

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Schwarz, *Adenauer*, 2:38.

share his gradually altering perceptions of Soviet Communism with Adenauer. In fact, Adenauer's anti-communism hindered the American realisation of change in the USSR.

If Adenauer had kept up with the U.S. popular opinion he would not have been so concerned. Returning from the USSR William Randolph Hearst Jr. claimed that the Soviets were only interested in peace out of necessity.⁶⁵ Hearst, like others, dismissed peace from the Soviets that may be given out of anything but the purest altruism, but even then Hearst suspected that the Soviets had ulterior motives. It was seemingly impossible for the Soviets to prove peaceful intentions without outright surrender. The whole notion was strikingly familiar to George Kennan's characterisation of Stalin in previous years that nothing short of the delivery of all American military forces to the USSR would tame the Soviets, but even then they would suspect an imperialist trap.⁶⁶ Hearst also asserted that the goal of the Soviet leaders remained world domination.⁶⁷

Indeed, the idea of Soviet desires for peace as fundamentally disingenuous was widespread in the press as well as in the administration. *Time* correspondents stressed that a changed Soviet "game" did not reflect any less of a hope to "win". This sentiment was closely related to the idea of Soviet emphasis on peace only being a response to Western cohesion and rearmament. In this instance the Soviet rapprochement and visit to Yugoslavia was a response to West German integration into NATO.⁶⁸ Indeed, Dulles made this same point to Eisenhower prior to the Geneva Foreign Ministers meeting.⁶⁹ Neither Eisenhower nor Dulles thought that the USSR was anywhere near collapse. Rather they thought that their desire for relaxation was a result of overextension, and this was a result of Western policies.⁷⁰

A consensus in some quarters on the nature of the Soviet threat did not equate to agreement on how to meet the challenge. Indeed, the Eisenhower administration was accused of not having any coherent strategy to counter the

⁶⁵ WR Hearst Jr, "Report on Russia-Uncensored!" CUL, HSP Box 370, Folder 7.

⁶⁶ Gaddis, *Strategies*, 20.

⁶⁷ WR Hearst Jr, "Report on Russia-Uncensored!"

⁶⁸ "US-USSR", Beal to Williamson, June 9, 1955, Reel 172, HL.

⁶⁹ "Preparations for the October Meeting of the Foreign Ministers."

⁷⁰ "US-USSR", Beal to Williamson, June 9, 1955.

peace offensive.⁷¹ To be sure, after more than four years of continuous Soviet peace rhetoric the Eisenhower administration lacked a plan to address it. However, this was also due to the nature of the challenge. The only way to counter was seen as a temporary Soviet alteration in posture was to wait it out, and when the Soviets reverted to violence towards the West say 'I told you so'. If the Soviet objectives were unchanging as Eisenhower, Dulles and most of the press claimed, then much of a 'plan' was not needed, only patience that the Soviets would not permanently be able to restrain their violent nature.⁷²

Chapter Conclusion

The administration still assumed the key Soviet objective to be worldwide communist domination. As such, any lack of hostility from the Soviets was immediately suspected as dishonest. The Soviet peace offensive was viewed through such a lens. By late 1955 important policymakers had come to accept that the change in the USSR was not merely tactical. The sustained nature of Soviet peace propaganda and gestures towards the west, in combination with the effects of destalinisation caused Eisenhower, Dulles and others to begin to accept that the Soviet Union was indeed changing. This acceptance, however, was only expressed in private, however, and even then with the caveat that the changes being undertaken could make the USSR more, not less, dangerous. This was due to a long history of mistrust, and domestic political imperatives, and the positions of U.S. allies. Destalinisation was not yet accepted as a genuine trend, and the leaders themselves were still regarded as fundamentally unchanged. If they were using different tactics it was only because they were better suited to the situation. Therefore, the Soviet leaders were not yet recognised as a different breed. But the acceptance that the Soviet Union was undergoing serious change allowed the perception of the Soviet leaders as rigid, doctrinaire Stalinists, to begin to break down.

⁷¹ "'Cold War', Shepley to Williamson," February 23, 1956, TCD, Box 1, Folder 11, HL.

⁷² Ibid.

Chapter 5: To the 20th Party Congress

By late 1955 differing views had emerged in the administration on the changes taking place in the USSR. The Geneva Summit played a role, but it would not have had any effect were it not for certain policymakers that found themselves in the vanguard of the development of a new understanding of Soviet intentions: an understanding that predated the summit. Bohlen was the most prominent, but he was gaining support from many in Washington such as Park Armstrong, Jacob Beam, and LW Fuller. From outside the government Kennan was calling for the administration to adjust policy to the new Soviet reality, as was Louis Halle (although in both cases their feuds with Dulles made the secretary reluctant to accept their analyses of the changes in the Soviet system). None of these men ceased to see the Soviet Union as a threat to the U.S. and the West. Rather, they had recognised that the Soviet 'new course' and new leadership represented both a challenge and an opportunity. If the U.S. did not adjust its perceptions and policies the U.S. would miss an opportunity to gain concessions or improve its position in the Cold War. In contrast, Dulles continued to view ultimate Soviet objectives as unaltered. He did not yet recognise a need for a changed outlook or policies. But events in 1956 would see Dulles adopt the new perception of the Soviet leaders that he had begun to fashion in 1955. This perception accepted the leaders as qualitatively different from Stalinists. Dulles was cagey with his new ideas and voiced them mostly in private. He spoke of them only in qualified terms in public. Indeed, for the first months of 1956 he maintained much the same position as he had since 1953: that of 'no basic change', as did Eisenhower.

U.S. Assessments and Influencing Change

By 1955 the Eisenhower administration understood the limitations of psychological warfare.¹ As a result, NSC-5505/1: "Exploitation of Soviet and European Satellite Vulnerabilities" included a reassessment of the type of change possible in the Soviet Bloc. It emphasised that the U.S. should seek evolutionary rather than revolutionary change in the USSR. Efforts at inducing rebellion and

¹ Walter L. Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture and the Cold War, 1945-1961* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1997), 101.

revolution behind the Iron Curtain had failed. The U.S. should therefore study how Soviet policy was likely to evolve and whether it could be stimulated in directions favourable to the U.S. Nonetheless, the administration concluded in a review of NSC-5505/1:

...there are as yet no indications of substantial evolution in a direction favorable to the U.S. Certain evidence is perhaps hopeful. For example, there has been some reduction in the powers of the secret police. The managerial class seems to want less political interference in business operations...*Nevertheless the Soviet Government remains a monolithic communist state, committed to its long-range objectives, hostile to the U.S., and determined to combat U.S. moves to strengthen the unity of the free world.*²

The recent statements of Soviet leaders supported the notion of the Soviets as hostile and expansionist. Speaking in Bombay during a tour of South Asia in November 1955, Khrushchev reasserted the Soviet commitment to Marxism-Leninism, telling doubters that they would have to “wait for pigs to fly” before they disavowed Lenin.³ Khrushchev had any number of reasons for making such a statement- the interests of his audience in Bombay most obviously- but growing tensions with China would have doubtless played a role as well. Yet to the ears of Eisenhower, Dulles and others, this only served to further their conviction that the Soviets remained the same men, with the same objectives, as they were under Stalin.⁴

It was a transitional period for the Eisenhower administration. The perception of the Soviet leaders as communists with the same goals of world domination remained prevalent. Nonetheless there were flashes of a new understanding of the methods pursued by the leaders since Stalin’s death. Dulles acknowledged that the Soviet leaders had come to “pursue their foreign policy goals with less manifestation of intolerance and less emphasis on violence.”⁵ As

² “Progress Report on NSC 5505/1,” January 14, 1956, WHO-SANSA, NSCS, Policy Paper Subseries, Box 14, NSC 5505/1-Exploitation of Soviet...(2), DDEL. Emphasis added.

³ “IR-7135: Selected Quotations From Recent Soviet Leadership Statements,” January 26, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 22, IR-7135, NARA.

⁴ Outside the administration many held similar views. Sovietologist Philip Mosely dismissed Soviet concessions as superficial and having no bearing on Soviet objectives. The only change had been in the style of Soviet foreign policy, rather than substance. Philip E. Mosely, “The Soviet Union and the United States: Problems and Prospects,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 303 (January 1956): 193–197; Time correspondents echoed this view and characterised the Soviet objectives as “unchanging”, and the leaders themselves interested only in the “conquest of humanity”. “‘Cold War’, Shepley to Williamson.”

⁵ Dulles quoted from: Bennett Kovrig, *The Myth of Liberation: East-Central Europe in U.S. Diplomacy and Politics since 1941* (Baltimore, 1973), 164.

these actions fulfilled Eisenhower's demand for peaceful gestures in his 1953 'Chance for Peace' speech, Dulles could hardly have said otherwise in public. Indeed, in Dulles' mind these actions were the result of the firm stance taken by the U.S. Dulles and Eisenhower therefore rejected Soviet gestures and emphasis on peaceful coexistence as mere "propaganda gambits". By 1956 the administration realised that psychological warfare was unlikely to have any effect. This resulted in a pivot towards cultural infiltration as a way of promoting evolutionary change in the USSR. But in order for Dulles and Eisenhower to even countenance cultural exchange programmes there must have been a change in their perceptions of the Soviet leaders. It was still a political gamble for Dulles to allow Soviets to explore the U.S.⁶ This would have exposed him to charges of weakness towards the USSR, and that the Soviet exchanges would have been rife with spies. The hysterical anti-communist atmosphere that characterised the early years of the Eisenhower administration had subsided a great deal; this was a chance Eisenhower and Dulles were willing to take. Domestic politics notwithstanding, they would not have done so without a change in their own preconceptions of the Soviet leaders.

Yet, leaders only acknowledged a change in Soviet tactics, not objectives. The PPS highlighted the increased flexibility of Soviet policies since 1953. Dulles and the State Department remained largely dismissive of this flexibility; it was simply a newer, better method of pursuing the same long-range objectives of spreading communism and undermining the West. Furthermore, smiles were a better way to undermine the West and attract neutrals and newly independent nations to the Soviet cause.⁷ Yet as Bohlen, Halle, Kennan and Fuller pointed out, the significance lay precisely in the changed tactics. The U.S. could hardly expect the Soviets to renounce communism. Indeed, the PPS recognised that the changes in tactics were indeed a tacit agreement on the part of the Soviets that the fundamental disagreements between the West and the USSR not be allowed to lead to war.⁸ This was itself a significant admission. Yet Dulles stubbornly clung to the fact that the Soviets were still communists, and thus rejected any suggestion

⁶ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 96–107.

⁷ This notion was raised not only within governments, but also in the Western press. See for example: "The Smiling Offensive," *Basler Nachrichten*, September 10, 1955, FO 371/118246, TNA.

⁸ Richard Davis, "General Estimate of Current Soviet Objectives and Policies in Foreign Affairs."

of improving relations. Dulles' all-or-nothing attitude prevented him from seeing the benefit of incremental changes.

Initial Reports of the 20th Party Congress

U.S. reactions to the 20th Party Congress came in three stages. Firstly were the reports of the Congress prior to Khrushchev's Secret Speech; secondly, were the reports of the speech after its existence and general contents were known to the West; and third, U.S. reactions when it finally obtained a copy of the speech.

U.S. Predictions of the 20th Party Congress were rather subdued. USIA issued guidance to its posts that nothing surprising was expected from the Congress, and that further guidance would be issued if any sensational news did emerge.⁹ In retrospect such a statement is startling, but such thoughts were common in the weeks prior to the Congress. Bohlen was reticent to offer any firm predictions, but did say he did not see any important policy changes coming as a result of the Congress. He predicted that peaceful coexistence would continue as the dominant foreign policy theme.¹⁰

Once the 20th Party Congress began it became clear that significant changes were indeed in the offing, even if they were not immediately apparent. Two themes gradually emerged: Stalin was further 'downgraded'; and a number of ideological changes were announced in order to better the position of the USSR abroad.

From the outset of the 20th Party Congress Stalin was under attack. In his opening address Khrushchev took pains to stress the importance of collective leadership while criticising the 'cult of personality' - though he neglected to name Stalin directly.¹¹ Mikoyan followed with a far more damaging speech that sought to dismiss much of what Stalin had done and instead emphasised Lenin's leadership and ideas. He ended by damningly calling for a replacement of Stalin's 'Short Course' on the history of the CPSU.¹² Even Molotov besmirched Stalin's

⁹ Policy Information Statement for USIA, EUR-243, February 8, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1989), 56-58.

¹⁰ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1808," February 10, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

¹¹ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1844," February 15, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA; "'Communist Congress', Beal to Gruin," February 16, 1956, TCD, Box 1, Folder 10, HL.

¹² "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1861," February 18, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

memory. He spoke in support of current policies, thereby criticising himself, and the Stalinist policies he had advocated in the past.¹³

Bohlen noted that it was not only the attacks on Stalin's policies or excesses that constituted destalinisation. The tremendous attention paid to collective leadership was in itself an implicit form of destalinisation. The attacks on the cult of personality and police power, in combination with the emphasis on collective leadership made the 20th Party Congress so interesting to the West. In addition, as Bohlen predicted, Khrushchev had so far not done anything to enhance his power. Almost every speaker supported collective leadership. Bohlen recognised that Khrushchev was the most powerful of the leaders, and the nature of collective leadership meant that there would be some disagreement, which could eventually lead to a breakdown of such an arrangement. This did not mean, however many in the West wanted it, that a power struggle was likely. There had been serious disagreements since 1953; Malenkov's 'deviation' towards light industry and Molotov's opposition to any number of foreign policy initiatives were examples, but collective leadership remained in tact, and this was a serious break from the Stalin period. Indeed, Bohlen was adamant that so far what the Congress had done was lay down further barriers to one-man rule.¹⁴

Although there was no shortage of disagreement between the Moscow embassy and the State Department over various changes in the USSR since Stalin's death, the events of the 20th Party Congress actually provided numerous points of agreement. An exhaustive State Department report on the Congress highlighted many of the same points as Bohlen had. In years past Stalin was simply ignored in favour of references to Lenin. But now he was being attacked much more directly:

The principal effect of the Congress was to call into question many aspects of Stalin's rule...caustic references were made to one-man decision making, leader-worship, over-centralisation, mistakes in economic policies, ossified conduct of foreign relations, distortions of ideology, propaganda, and Soviet history, unhealthy developments in Soviet law, and arbitrariness in law enforcement.¹⁵

¹³ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1871," February 20, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

¹⁴ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1992, 1 of 2," March 6, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

¹⁵ "IR-7205, 'The Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union,'" March 6, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 109, USSR, NARA.

The damage to Stalin's reputation done at the 20th Party Congress prior to the Secret Speech was not a complete shock. The reduced role of Stalin's image had been noted since 1953.¹⁶ At the Congress two methods of attack were predominant; direct attacks on Stalin's policies or ones that were associated his time in power; or, if speaking of something positive that came about during his reign, simply omitting any mention of his role. Foreign policy under Stalin was described as inflexible and the international position of the USSR diminished. Stalin's record was torn to shreds in the hands of his former lieutenants.¹⁷

The State Department realised the myriad risks in attacking Stalin. It destroyed the idea of communist infallibility. It also put the current leaders in an awkward position since they all rose to power under Stalin. Nevertheless, the gains were apparent. The regime could now embark on new policies without being attacked by Stalinists. Indeed, removing Stalin allowed the leaders to rely on Lenin as the source of legitimacy. The State Department thought that the emphasis on Lenin in turn was more attractive to many in the developing world and to the non-Communist left. According to the OIR the Soviet leaders:

...doubtless weighed the effects on Communist Parties at home and abroad, including the Chinese Communist Party...To attack the symbol would bring both gains and losses, but the net result apparently has considered to be favorable. The Congress offered an opportune occasion since it is formally the Party's most authoritative body and its approval, however automatic, could be portrayed as carrying the greatest sanction.¹⁸

The re-emphasis of Lenin and other figures in Soviet political history did not go unnoticed. Harrison Salisbury reported that the purges were to be reassessed and many of its most prominent victims rehabilitated. The attack on Stalin had gone far even before the Secret Speech. In a speech to the 20th Party Congress, Mikoyan openly mocked the oath that Stalin took at Lenin's funeral; leading Salisbury to write that "[n]ot only has the statue of Stalin been hurled from its fundament, the leaders have danced upon the fragments."¹⁹ But it was

¹⁶ Harrison Salisbury, "Soviet History Purge," *New York Times*, February 20, 1956, HSP Box 172, Folder 16, CUL.

¹⁷ "IR-7205," March 6, 1956.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Salisbury, "Soviet History Purge"; Walt Rostow wrote to Allen Dulles and highlighted the importance of Lenin for underdeveloped areas. Rostow urged a presidential speech to counter the propaganda effect of Lenin. Rostow said that Eisenhower should welcome the condemnation of Stalin and calls for peaceful coexistence that were highlights of the Congress. But he should also emphasise that it was Lenin who created the Cheka and normalised the use of terror in politics.

also done to reveal the Leninist foundation.

The U.S. view was not isolated. There were fears among allies about the emphasis on Lenin. Both the French and British were concerned that the repudiation of Stalinism and “return” to Leninism could be interpreted by the uninformed as a “new and enlightened Soviet policy.” It was a real possibility in France where many intellectuals had only recently accepted the horrors of Stalinism. The response was to encourage the distribution of academic studies of Leninism that highlighted Lenin’s true nature as undemocratic.²⁰

The emphasis on collective leadership at the 20th Party Congress would make it difficult for a new Stalin figure to emerge. Salisbury stated that Khrushchev’s avocation of collective leadership, as well as his opening of the records of the secret police, made it unlikely that he sought Stalin’s position. But Salisbury noted that these changes were hardly concrete. There were no changes in the Party apparatus that would prevent one man from consolidating power. There seemed to be a “comrades agreement” among the leaders that whatever their differences they would not revert to Stalinism.²¹ But through speeches at the Congress Khrushchev, and Mikoyan especially, were making it difficult for anyone to *want* to claim ‘Stalinist’ as a label. In contrast to the emphasis on Lenin, Stalin’s name was only mentioned to smear it. It had been uttered only ten times in the ten days of the 20th Party Congress.²² The Soviet leaders willingly jettisoned Stalin and many of the damaging policies associated with him. Such a change should have brought to the attention of the West the possibility that the leadership followed Stalin during his tenure out of necessity, rather than ideological affinity. But there is no evidence of this thought occurring to either Eisenhower or Dulles.

The internal nature of the return to Leninism highlighted by Bohlen, and the foreign propaganda potential highlighted in London and Paris and by

Rostow urged Dulles to make it clear that Leninism led directly to Stalinism. The system of collective leadership that the leaders were now trumpeting was a Leninist construct, but this hardly meant it was democratic. Rostow insisted it could be just as tyrannical as Stalinism. “Memo: Rostow to AD,” February 24, 1956, CDJP, 1931-67, Box 91, Rostow, Walt W., 1956, DDEL.

²⁰ Leonard Shapiro’s work was given as an example. “Cable: Dillon to SecState, No.3778,” February 21, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

²¹ Harrison Salisbury, “Collective Leadership,” *New York Times*, February 23, 1956, HSP Box 172, Folder 16, CUL.

²² Harrison Salisbury, “The Decline of Stalin,” *New York Times*, February 26, 1956, HSP Box 172, Folder 16, CUL.

Rostow, made it clear that re-emphasis of Lenin was a well-crafted component of the attack on Stalin. The State Department and some Sovietologists immediately took note. The ideological changes announced at the 20th Party Congress were interpreted a danger to the U.S. abroad. The changes announced were not new: they had been happening in stages since 1953. But the U.S. recognised that the Congress formalised them into official Party doctrine.²³ The most important of the changes announced were:

- The 'two camp' theory that divided the world into 'imperialist' (the West) and democratic (the Soviet bloc) nations was abandoned. Now a "third camp" of neutrals was allowed
- The achievement of power through parliamentary processes was condoned
- Evolutionary rather than revolutionary attainment of socialism was deemed acceptable
- Co-operation with leftist parties, akin to the popular fronts of the 1930s, was sanctioned
- Different, 'national roads' to socialism were acknowledged
- The inevitability of war thesis was abandoned

These ideological changes were crafted to maximise the appeal of the USSR and Soviet Communism abroad. Permitting parliamentary processes, working with other leftist parties, and evolutionary attainment of socialism all had deep appeal to communists not only in Europe, but also in the developing world. These changes had the most potential among the newly independent nations of the developing world. The 20th Party Congress did not initiate any of these changes- it merely codified them, as they had all be part of processes undertaken since Stalin's death. But the administration thought the Congress allowed the Soviet leaders to announce them in a way that they would be taken seriously by those whom they hoped to sway.²⁴

²³ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1992, 1 of 2"; "IR-7205," March 6, 1956.

²⁴ The ideological changes were initially reported by Bohlen, but were analysed by a number of others. "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1862," February 18, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1992, 2 of 2," March 6, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1845," February 15, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA; "IR-7205," March 6, 1956; "'Communist Congress', Beal to Gruin."

The Eisenhower administration viewed these changes with alarm. They made the Soviets appear less violent.²⁵ In combination with the denouncement of Stalin and the ongoing peace offensive there was a real sense of danger in Washington that the USSR, by manipulating the emotions of decolonisation, would come across to many in the developing world as the true champion of peace.

The 20th Party Congress and the Battle over Peace

The effect of the 20th Party Congress on perceptions of the Soviet peace offensive occurred mostly prior to the knowledge in the West that Khrushchev had given a 'secret speech'. The revelations of the speech naturally had an impact, but no greater than those of the developments of the rest of the Congress. As such, the various speeches and resolutions made by the Congress were scrutinised for any clues about the future of Soviet foreign policy, including, the peace offensive.

Even in the period prior to the Secret Speech there were numerous developments of interest. Bohlen noted that the overriding foreign policy theme was 'peaceful coexistence'.²⁶ But other important foreign policy themes, as noted above, were also developed. These revisions, in combination with the Soviet emphasis on peace, were crafted to make Soviet ideology more alluring and the Soviet leaders less threatening. Bohlen told the State Department that the revisions were a necessity: the Soviet peace campaign made little sense without them. Khrushchev needed to publicly reconcile communist militancy with Soviet emphasis on peaceful coexistence. In this case, the doctrine of the inevitability of war, which had been undergoing public revision in Soviet journals and the press since late 1954, was finally scrapped. Indeed, all of the substantive doctrinal revisions were essential since Soviet foreign policy had been proceeding along ideologically different lines since 1953. But the elimination of the inevitability of war between communism and capitalism struck Bohlen as especially important. Echoing his June 1953 cables to Dulles, Bohlen argued that the Soviets would not

²⁵ "IR-7205," March 6, 1956; U.S. concern was not misplaced. British Ambassador in Moscow Sir William Hayter told Khrushchev himself that he thought the doctrinal changes more important than the attack on Stalin. *The Kremlin and the Embassy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1966), 126-128.

²⁶ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1845"; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1862."

embark on such a fundamental change to Soviet ideology merely as a way to confuse or divide the West.²⁷

The State Department agreed that the changes announced at the 20th Party Congress were the crystallisation of changes in the making since 1953. It was now admitting that the Soviets *had* been looking for a new policy after Stalin's death, but that the changes only occurred over time. Peace was at the forefront of this. Rather than rely on force or violence, the Soviets had come to the conclusion that they would 'catch more flies with honey'. To the PPS and DRS, the jettisoning of Stalin's force based policies was wise: peaceful coexistence would help attract support in the developing world in pursuit of a "zone of peace", as well in the Western public and left-wing parties, and even in the U.S. where it was hoped it would create resistance to further arms spending.²⁸ Indeed, it was admitted the Soviet leaders must have thought Stalin's policies were incorrect, yet rather than posit that this could be due to farther reaching changes, the State Department only went so far as to call the emphasis on peace 'tactical'. In a sense, these changes actually made the Soviets more dangerous, not less, since the new tactics had a much broader appeal.²⁹

Even after the U.S. knew that Khrushchev had made a speech highly critical of Stalin, the focus remained on the ideological reforms of the 20th Party Congress.³⁰ A PPS report underlined that the most important foreign policy theme of the Congress was the official sanction of peaceful coexistence because "in the Soviet lexicon still denotes a maintenance of maximum possible pressures for the exploitation of the weaknesses and contradictions in the outside world in order to enhance Soviet power." The report also noted Khrushchev's assertion at the Congress that communism would triumph over capitalism.³¹ Of course, he could

²⁷ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1862."

²⁸ "'Cold War II', Beal to Williamson..." February 23, 1956, TCD, Box 1, Folder 11, HL; "IR-7205," March 6, 1956.

²⁹ "'Cold War II'" Time correspondents had a cosy relationship with a number of State Department staff. They received frequent leaks from those who thought that Eisenhower and Dulles were not being firm enough; essentially from staff who were sympathetic with Time's position on the Cold War. Most often leaks came from staff in the Russian and Eastern European Division (DRS). The dispatches often, but not always named their source. In this case it was Francis Stevens in DRS.

³⁰ Bohlen learned at a French Embassy reception on 10 March that Khrushchev had given a speech detailing Stalin's crimes at a secret session of the Congress. "Cable: Bohlen to SecState," March 12, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

³¹ "General Implications for U.S. Policy of Soviet Party Congress," April 6, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 109, USSR, NARA.

hardly have been expected to say otherwise. But in an important development the author of the report, Richard Davis, emphasised that the switch towards peaceful coexistence seemed to be for the long term and made the return to Stalinist style rule less likely. He did not think that peaceful coexistence was a trick- too much thought had gone into it- and so the U.S. should cautiously accept it.³² This was a serious assertion. Davis was confident enough in his conclusion to share it with the rest of the PPS and the NSC. This was not the action of someone who was unsure of his conclusions, or feared the ramifications of openly airing them.

Though Bohlen and Davis both highlighted the importance and unprecedented nature of the peace offensive, their words did not affect the public posture of the administration. USIS instructed its missions abroad that the Soviet leaders had broken from their previous emphasis on force and violence, but only because they realised they would gain more from peaceful tactics. Dulles contributed to this when he emphasised that “Soviet rulers must now see that their foreign policies encounter effective resistance when they are identified with the use of violence” and as a result the Soviets were trying to appear more respectable.³³

Parts of the Eisenhower administration were again discrediting the Soviet shift and the benefits it could bring the U.S. simply because the motivations were not honourable. It was as if rather than rejoicing in the fact that a niece had stopped smoking and appreciating the consequent health benefits, Uncle Sam instead dismissed it since the niece only quit since men found non-smokers more attractive. USIS guidance accordingly advised that the U.S. should ignore the changes (fewer cigarettes) and instead emphasise in its broadcasts that the fundamental objectives (more male attention) remained the same. Just as the gestures of the Soviets and events of the past three years did not yet amount to enough reasoning to challenge the deeply held perceptions of the Soviet leaders as communist expansionists, the events of the Congress so far did not represent anything shocking enough to change the minds of Eisenhower or Dulles. The Secret Speech would later do just that.

³² Ibid.

³³ Circular Airgram from the USIA to all USIS Missions, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 9* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1988), 567-578.

The Initial Response to the 20th Party Congress

Though there was agreement that the changes of the 20th Party Congress so far were largely a crystallisation of policy alterations underway since 1953, the developments of the Congress were perceived as threatening nonetheless. “It’s dangerous as hell”, said one State Department source to a *Time* correspondent, “[t]he Russians will be harder to handle until we can expose their game again”. Bohlen agreed: the ideological shifts of the Congress especially were “dangerous and seductive”.³⁴ An image of the Soviets as the enemy had been build up so thoroughly that it was second nature to dismiss any Soviet changes were to the detriment of the U.S. and the West.

There was consensus between the State Department and the Moscow embassy on how to counter the ideological shifts. The U.S. needed to make it abundantly clear that the 20th Party Congress changed little in terms of how communists would act once in power. Bohlen believed the means did not matter since the end result would be dictatorship, and he even suggested referring to the collective leadership in public as a “collective dictatorship”.³⁵ Although he suggested this particular phrase, Bohlen doubted the effect that a broader propaganda drive could have. Indeed, it could play into the hands of the Soviets as they had likely planned for just such a response. Bohlen pointed out that Lenin wrote so voluminously that something could be found to support practically *any* argument. Such an anti-Lenin propaganda campaign could “boomerang”. Dulles agreed. A frontal attack on Lenin was a poor idea; it would be better if material on Lenin’s true nature could be made available globally by “indigenous [press] agencies”.³⁶

³⁴ “Cold War II”; “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1888,” February 22, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

³⁵ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1918,” February 25, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA; “Cable: Hoover to Bohlen, No.1950,” March 5, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA.

³⁶ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1888”; “Cable: JFD to Moscow, London, Paris, Bonn, No.11655,” February 24, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA; Rostow remained adamant that Eisenhower should make a public statement and published an article in the *Washington Star* to this effect. He again urged action to counter what he saw as a 'zombie Lenin' that was being used by the Soviets to establish legitimacy and continuity. He again argued for a presidential statement that welcomed the honesty of the Soviets in describing Stalin’s crimes and the emphasis on coexistence. But the statement should note that this was hardly the extent of communist crimes in the USSR. It

Dulles publicly downplayed any change and insisted that the emphasis on Lenin and the ideological alterations announced were instead the result of western policies. The changes were a tactic in themselves: Dulles stressed that both Lenin and Stalin had taught communists to 'zigzag'. The West should not be so naïve to believe there had been any lasting change. Dulles cited Khrushchev's statements following Geneva that communism would triumph as proof of this. If the West were to be taken in by the new Soviet line, then the result would be a return to aggression on the part of the Soviets when the West as least prepared.³⁷ Speaking to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in late February 1956 he stated that for the past 30 years Soviet foreign policy had been based upon violence and intolerance of any non-Soviet sanctioned system. Yet now peaceful coexistence and different roads to socialism were accepted. Thus, Dulles saw the Soviet changes not so much as a change in tactics as the result of a failed foreign policy. This failure was caused by Western pressure. Interestingly though, Dulles admitted that the Soviet "new program" had been in place ever since the rapprochement with Tito. Now that violence had been shelved in the arsenal of Soviet tactics, the danger to the West now was from competitive coexistence.

But what Dulles said next was a serious break from the rhetoric he had been recycling since he became Secretary of State. After each Soviet alteration away from Stalinism Dulles emphasised that there had been no basic change in Soviet objectives or policies, and that the danger to the West remained the same. Yet in response to a question about the relative strength of the U.S. and USSR, Dulles stated that the Soviets were actively changing their system to become *more*

was imperative that the U.S. did something to debunk the myths of Leninism that the Soviets were peddling. Referring to the 20th Congress he urged the administration to: "...remember that these speeches and the ideological shift they incorporate are part of a major offensive of great force addressed to the underdeveloped areas and to Western Europe, which we can only counter by a vigorous projection of the highest values to which we are attached..." "Memo: Walt Rostow," February 24, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA; "The Emerging Communist Line on the Khrushchev De-Stalinization Speech..." March 24, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA; Eisenhower's Special Assistant William Jackson rebuffed the idea of the president making any statement on the matter. An address was fraught with pitfalls: it could lend weight to the very thing the Rostow was trying to undermine; not to mention it was hardly the president's place to get involved in a discussion of Communist Party history. Furthermore, Lenin appeared to command real respect in the USSR- thus a presidential address could be interpreted as a personal affront to Soviet history. "Memo: W Jackson to Washburn," February 24, 1956, RG59 BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA.

³⁷ "DeptState PR-92," February 25, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML.

like the U.S. He thought it would take another decade for these changes to be totally clear. Stalinism was the stumbling block to better relations according to Dulles, but now "...they are going to throw out of the Soviet Union what has been their Bible for the last 25 or 30 years."³⁸ Dulles did not clarify how Soviet objectives were remaining static while the Soviet leaders actively reformed the Soviet system to be more like American capitalism. But Senator George Aiken noticed the difference in Dulles' outlook, and demanded to know if he had undergone such a drastic change in thinking, as his recent utterances would lead some to believe. Characteristically Dulles emphasized that he believed the same things he did five or ten years ago.³⁹ Yet in a recent speech Dulles stated that "Some day, I would not want to guess when, Russia will be governed by men who put the welfare of the Russian people above world conquest. It is our basic policy to seek to advance the coming of that day."⁴⁰ At the very least this was a softening of his rhetoric, as Senator Aiken had noted in his appearance on Capitol Hill. Dulles was accepting the reality of change in the USSR while publicly dismissing the meaning of these changes. Ever cognisant of Congressional opinion, Dulles was hedging his public statements to avoid getting ahead of the curve of American political opinion of the changes in the USSR. Indeed, many Senators expressed the opinion that although Soviet methods had changed, the original objectives were not abandoned. But it was notable if Democratic senators were accusing Dulles of being "overly-optimistic" about the Soviets.⁴¹ On one level Dulles was simply restating the goals of NSC-5505/1. Yet Dulles was not the sort of person to publicly repeat things he did not feel confident in. To be sure, he continued his 'no basic change' line long after NSC-5505/1 was written. Instead, the 20th Party Congress was having an effect on his perception of the Soviets. This was the impetus behind his statement that the Soviet leaders were capable of change, and that this was what the world was not witnessing.

³⁸ "Dulles Transcript Highlights."

³⁹ *Ibid.*; Ironically it was almost exactly ten years since Dulles had undergone an extraordinary transition from moderate internationalist to strident anti-communist who blamed the Soviets for most of the world's problems. See: Ronald W. Pruessen, *John Foster Dulles: The Road to Power* (New York: Free Press, 1982), 272-293.

⁴⁰ "DeptState PR-92."

⁴¹ "Daily Opinion Summary," February 27, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2694-2820, Jan-June 1956, 3, NARA.

Speaking to the Council on Foreign Relations Allen Dulles revealed his own modified image of Soviet Communism. There was no longer a monolithic communist organisation. Instead, the 20th Party Congress sanctioned various brands of communism and “change [was] the order of the day”. The U.S. could never have expected these events, said Dulles, and the “Soviet leaders are now frightened of what they have unleashed...The effect of recent developments on students, for example, is far-reaching.” But Dulles noted that different brands of communism could also be more dangerous to the U.S. by allowing communism to adapt to local conditions. The U.S. needed to counter these by creating maximum opportunities for change and evolution in the USSR in a direction favourable to the West.⁴²

The U.S. Learns of the Secret Speech

Despite the emphasis by Dulles on the changing nature of Soviet communism, and by extension, the communist movement generally, the official position of the administration remained unchanged prior to learning of the Secret Speech. In March the NSC asserted that Soviet hostility towards the non-communist world had not changed, nor had its objective of creating a communist dominated world. This was the same position set out in NSC-5501 in January 1955. The difference, according to the NSC, was only one of tactics. Rather than violence and coercion, the Soviet leaders were now relying on “division, enticement and duplicity.” The danger lay in the fact that wherever the Soviets used a ‘soft line’, Western allies would be prone to explore it.⁴³ Bohlen was the first American to learn of the Speech on 10 March.⁴⁴ This was too late to be incorporated into the revised policy. However, the 20th Party Congress was not mentioned in even a general sense. Both the ideological developments and the attacks on Stalin were known of by 21-22 February via cables from the Moscow embassy.⁴⁵ Thus the events of the Congress, prior to the Secret Speech, had little effect on the review of U.S. policy and the Soviet threat.

⁴² “Meeting Digest, Allen Dulles,” March 11, 1956, CFR, Box 447, Folder 5, ML.

⁴³ NSC Report: NSC 5602/1, Basic National Security Policy, March 15, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19*, 265-268.

⁴⁴ Editorial Note 33, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24, 72*; “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.2045,” March 12, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

⁴⁵ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1883,” February 21, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 3, NARA; Editorial Note 33, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24, 72*.

There was little deviation from the established line that the USSR retained the same threatening objectives in the weeks that followed. Preparing to speak on Capitol Hill, Undersecretary of State Hoover was encouraged by Jacob Beam to emphasise that although Khrushchev and others had renounced Stalin's most heinous methods at the 20th Party Congress, the policies themselves were not attacked. This apparently illustrated that the Soviet leaders were seeking to disassociate themselves from Stalin in order to gain support domestically while making themselves more respectable abroad. The weakness of this, according to Beam, was that the current leaders had been Stalin's accomplices. Beam suggested that Hoover simply tell the U.S. Congress that Stalin's reputation had been in decline since his death and the speech was the latest development in this trend.⁴⁶ At this point the U.S. only knew that Khrushchev had been critical of Stalin. Such paltry intelligence necessitated that policymakers fit this information into what the U.S. knew of destalinisation thus far. As a result, Beam and Hoover made sense of the explosive Secret Speech by rationalising it as the latest in a series of tactical moves meant to gain advantage for the Kremlin.

But the U.S. was gradually putting together a picture of what Khrushchev had said. It was becoming clear that his speech was far more critical than the other speeches at the 20th Party Congress. Finding intelligence on the Congress meant looking to Yugoslavia and its unique position in drama of destalinisation. The Belgrade daily *Borba* welcomed the criticism of Stalin and noted that the Congress appeared to necessitate serious revisions in Party doctrine and history regarding Stalin's role in Soviet history.⁴⁷ The CPSU was, however, holding meetings throughout the USSR to inform Party members of the new line on Stalin and Khrushchev's speech. Other intelligence was inconclusive. The speech was well known among the Soviet citizenry and the accusations against Stalin were shocking enough to bring some to tears, while others welcomed the denunciation. A Soviet source told the Moscow embassy that the speech revealed Stalin as a coward who was paralysed by the German attack in 1941, and that "within days,

⁴⁶ "Memo: Beam to Acting SecState (Hoover)," March 19, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

⁴⁷ "The XXth Congress of the USSR About Stalin..." *Borba*, March 20, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin Committee, NARA.

Stalin's name will be wiped from the slate of Soviet history."⁴⁸ Such conflicting reports did not help policymakers make sense of the actions of the Soviet leadership.

The U.S. and Foreign Opinion of the 20th Party Congress

Khrushchev had irreversibly denounced Stalin. That much was clear, even if the specifics were remained hazy. In the weeks following the 20th Party Congress the State Department collected reports on reaction to the Congress. To the Western allies the Congress did little to change the Soviet threat, although the French remained the most receptive to the ideological changes and therefore represented a danger to allied unity.⁴⁹ But there were differing interpretations of the Congress. Indeed, The British had put forward the idea that by discrediting Stalin and sullyng the idea of a Stalinist "golden era" the Soviets were preparing the Soviet people for even more sacrifices under a new five-year plan.⁵⁰ The British were under the impression that Khrushchev could be instituting a greater emphasis on heavy industry and rearmament. The Italian Vice Premier and Social Democratic leader Giuseppe Saragat theorised that the campaign against Stalin was done by the Soviet leaders out of fear that another Stalin figure could emerge. Destalinisation was a way to 'burn the bridge'.⁵¹

Reports from non-aligned nations made for disconcerting reading for those in Washington as they often indicated a tendency to accept Soviet changes. The Yugoslavs felt that the changes were genuine political ones and not mere tactics. The Yugoslavs viewed both the ideological changes enshrined by the 20th Party Congress, and the denouncement of Stalin, as very real policy choices. The Yugoslav Ambassador in Bucharest told the U.S. delegation: "[the] renouncification of Stalinism was a great deal more than merely the tactic of

⁴⁸ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1883"; "Cable: Walmsley to SecState, No.2123," March 20, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

⁴⁹ "Cable: Alger to SecState, No.822," March 5, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Despatch: E O'Shaughnessy to Dept of State, No.1869," March 8, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

⁵⁰ "Cable: Jernegan to SecState, No.3228," March 21, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

⁵¹ Ibid. Historian Isaac Deustcher thought the Congress was an honest move towards greater political freedom.

blaming [Stalin]...for present unsatisfactory conditions. It was a change in basic policy."⁵²

The reaction of Western allies and non-aligned nations had the effect of reinforcing the initial rejection of the changes at the 20th Party Congress. U.S. allies were in broad agreement with U.S. assessments. Non-aligned and third world nations however, wanted to give the Soviets the benefit of the doubt. This made the U.S. think that as far as destalinisation was aimed at improving the image of the USSR in the developing world, it was working. Thus, even though destalinisation was something that in one way reduced the threat of the USSR, it was also conceived as something that raised the threat as well in another manner.

The 20th Party Congress and U.S. Propaganda

U.S. information outlets needed to say something about the 20th Party Congress before U.S. had a copy of the speech. Though propaganda was obviously crafted for the greatest effect, the way in which it was created sheds light on how the administration was coming to view both the Secret Speech and destalinisation.

There were initially two propaganda lines, one for inside and one for outside the Soviet Bloc. For those in the USSR and satellites the State Department broadcast radio commentaries that emphasised the absence of criticism of Stalin's agricultural policies. Noting that half of the Soviet population was engaged in farming, the radio broadcast argued that Khrushchev had been even more supportive of collectivisation than Stalin himself. Indeed, Khrushchev was currently renewing a drive for the elimination of private garden plots- something Stalin had also attempted. The bottom line was there could be no meaningful break with Stalinism without an end to collectivisation.⁵³

Outside the Soviet Bloc the U.S. tactic was to raise possible bad outcomes of Stalin's denouncement. The U.S. did not openly reject the possibility of change, but asked how was the West to know if the 'new' regime wouldn't be *worse* than Stalin? Aimed at Western Europeans, this line stressed that evolutionary change

⁵² "Cable: Thayer to SecState, No.306," March 5, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Despatch: Thayer to Dept of State, No.266," March 6, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

⁵³ "Radio Commentary, Cultural Program Services Division," March 20, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA.

in the USSR would not come from relaxation and neutralism. Real change would only come if Soviet leaders were convinced of the firmness and determination of the free world even in the face of changing communist tactics: in other words, a continuation of current policies. Yet the most poignant argument was that Stalinism and communism could not be separated. This fit well with repeated public comments from the administration that the Soviet leaders were no different from Stalin.⁵⁴ Yet it was also disingenuous: it was not the actual view of the administration as shown by the remarks Foster Dulles made regarding nationalist versions of socialism in 1955, the statements of Allen Dulles following the 20th Party Congress, and of course as U.S. support for Yugoslavia illustrated.⁵⁵

The administration was taking a bullish stance. Harrison Salisbury did not think this wise and recommended a more gentle approach to the USIA. A “hard sell” of the anti-Stalin campaign, he insisted, could provide a point of unity for the Soviets. The Russian people would likely start to question the Soviet system on their own.⁵⁶ If the U.S. got involved it could be intrusive and counterproductive. USIA Deputy Director Abbott Washburn agreed, noting that too much ‘pressing’ of the anti-Stalin line by the Voice of America could hurt the U.S. cause. Yet USIA guidance clearly showed that Washburn differed from Salisbury in his conception of “hard sell”. Washburn thought it good policy to use USIA output to provoke questions among those in the Soviet bloc- questions that would lead to public opinion pressures.⁵⁷ USIA output therefore questioned the sincerity of the anti-Stalin campaign and demanded proof of Soviet intentions. In the satellites USIA pointed to the support current leaders gave to Stalin during his lifetime.⁵⁸ This was hardly taking a soft stance- it was clearly aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the Kremlin. USIA was making hay while the sun shone.

⁵⁴ “Significance of the Anti-Stalin Campaign in the USSR,” March 20, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA.

⁵⁵ “Meeting Digest, Allen Dulles”; “Daily Opinion Summary,” March 2, 1955.

⁵⁶ “Letter: Salisbury to Washburn,” March 21, 1956, RG306, USIA, Soviet Affairs Records, Box 577, Director-Correspondence 1956, NARA.

⁵⁷ “Letter: Washburn to Salisbury,” April 6, 1956, RG306, USIA, Soviet Affairs Records, Box 577, Director-Correspondence 1956, NARA.

⁵⁸ “Memo: Beam to Murphy,” April 6, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA; “Memo: Beam to Murphy Re: OCB Ad Hoc Committee on Stalin,” April 6, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA.

U.S. information agencies incorporated into their guidance the idea that Stalinism and Communism were peas in a pod. The official line was that the world now knew the horror of Stalin's crimes. The true meaning of the attack on Stalin was unknown, however, USIA suggested that it was a way for the current leaders to improve their own standing. This hardly represented meaningful change to the State Department, which emphasised that world domination remained the Soviet objective - all the 20th Party Congress meant was that the goal would now be pursued with less violent means. It did not indicate the Soviets had changed; U.S. propaganda reminded readers and listeners that the current leadership remained Stalinist.⁵⁹ Some took up JK Jessup's ideas from the previous year and drew attention to such 'Stalinist' policies as the occupation of Eastern Europe and the division of Germany.⁶⁰

The State Department was spinning the 20th Party Congress as an event that sought to hide the continuity of Stalinist policies by exposing the very worst of Stalin's crimes, thus presenting the Soviet leaders as a new breed of communists. The State Department emphasised to anyone who tended to give the Soviets the benefit of the doubt that the Congress was simply psychological warfare. The leaders were of the same ilk as Stalin. Thus the public line agreed and disseminated by the State Department illustrated the continuity in thinking about the changes in the USSR since Stalin's death. The 20th Party Congress was certainly the most explosive event thus far in the saga of the Soviet leadership since 1953, but it was built on a foundation of anti-Stalin feeling that had been growing since Stalin's death, and made possible by leadership changes. Since the Eisenhower administration had been responding to these since 1953, the reflex was to dismiss the Congress as merely a sort of Soviet trickery, even in the face of mounting evidence that something of serious implication for U.S. policy had occurred.

⁵⁹ "Memo: Murphy to SecState," March 21, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Radio Commentary, Cultural Program Services Division," March 23, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA.

⁶⁰ "Cable: Outgoing Circular from Dulles, No.11834," March 22, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

USIA's message of constant scepticism extended beyond the 20th Party Congress; when rumours that the Cominform would be disbanded reached Washington its significance was immediately dismissed. According to the USIA, the Cominform had long been a shell organisation- it had not met since 1949 and its principal work was the publication of the biweekly *For a Lasting Peace, for a People's Democracy*. Therefore, disbandment would hardly be a blow to Soviet control over the satellite communist parties. But, disbanding the Cominform was thought to be a way of increasing the respectability of Soviet Communism abroad, especially in Yugoslavia and India, both of which had suggested ending the organisation. It was merely another move to appeal to socialists and neutralists abroad, and in this respect it was meant to work with the ideological revisions announced at the Congress. Indeed, when the Cominform was officially disbanded on 18 April USIA instructed its posts that it "...should endeavour, whenever appropriate, to indicate that dissolution...would be practically meaningless." The U.S. press was uniformly unimpressed. The *New York Times* noted, as USIA did, that it "never amounted to much", and the *Washington Post* also pointed out the propaganda value of the move. Both DRS and Allen Dulles agreed with this characterisation.⁶¹ Although the end of the Cominform was assumed to be meaningless, Foster Dulles maintained the sense of danger posed by Soviet Communism. Speaking to Congress later in the summer, he insisted the Soviets maintained underground ties with foreign communist parties. Therefore, the CPSU remained the "'general staff' of the 'world proletariat'". But Foster Dulles conceded that destalinisation, and specifically the Poznan riots, had shaken this relationship. No longer were foreign communist parties controlled through Stalinist terror- they had gained a degree of independence.⁶² This was a significant departure from the previous view that the Soviets were firmly in charge of communist parties abroad, and was at odds with the idea of the Soviets as the 'general staff' of communism. If he indeed felt that there was no change in the Soviet command of the communist movement, then he had little to gain by

⁶¹ "Memo on Cominform," April 2, 1956, RG306, USIA, Soviet Affairs Records, Box 577, Cominform, NARA; "Despatch: Streibert to All USIA Posts," April 18, 1956, RG306, USIA, Soviet Affairs Records, Box 577, Cominform, NARA; Rosenberg, *Soviet-American Relations*, 95; "Daily Opinion Summary," April 19, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2694-2820, Jan-June 1956, 2, NARA.

⁶² "DeptState PR-360," June 27, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML.

mentioning how communist parties outside the USSR were more independent. Dulles' comments indicate that he was grappling with the changes occurring in the communist movement, and clearly did not think the Kremlin was firmly in control.

The public response to the 20th Party Congress provided an interesting point of comparison for the administration's internal treatment of these issues. It showed that there was a level of critical thinking about the events of the Congress. In terms of concrete steps, the OCB created the Special Working Group on the anti-Stalin Campaign to address these issues. It included representatives from the State Department, CIA, and USIA and was tasked with determining U.S. policy towards the anti-Stalin campaign and recommending ways for the to exploit destalinisation.⁶³ The creation of the Special Working Group indicated an understanding of the gravity of the situation, especially as the State Department representatives Jacob Beam and Park Armstrong were high-ranking officials. The group would meet frequently over the next year.

Indeed, Armstrong interpreted the 20th Party Congress in a much different manner than the public pronouncements. He emphasised that the Congress opened up to questioning much of Soviet history. The Soviet leaders appeared to be trying to separate the 'good' Stalin from the 'bad', and were highlighting the dangers of one-man-rule, rather than discrediting Stalin's policies *per se*. Armstrong pointed out that the Soviets did not take such actions lightly- they knew the risks: discipline problems abroad; questioning of Soviet authority; and the close relationship the leaders had with Stalin. They seemed to be relying on the popularity of destalinisation with the intelligentsia, military and the managerial classes. According to Armstrong, destalinisation was clearly a way to prevent another Stalin; but if the USSR was to be run without a dictator, then a different response to authority was needed. The Soviet people needed to feel they could be heard and could engage in some criticism.⁶⁴ The Congress seemed to be the beginning of such a move.

⁶³ "Letter: Richards to Beam," March 22, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 14, Anti-Stalin Campaign, NARA This is addressed further in chapter 7.

⁶⁴ "Memo: Armstrong to A Dulles," March 20, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

Though Dulles was beginning to modify his perception of the USSR prior to the 20th Party Congress, what he shared with others remained hostile towards destalinisation. In guidance to USIA posts in April he encouraged rejection of Soviet changes that had culminated at the Congress. Soviet objectives of expanding communism and dividing the Western alliance remained. In fact, the Congress made these objectives more threatening as the Soviet leaders made clear their dedication to communism “in unmistakable terms” and had laid out a plan of action to achieve them. The attack on Stalin did not set back the Soviet advance- indeed it was credited by USIA as a way to advance Soviet interests by increasing the respectability of Soviet Communism abroad.

This was part of a more general Soviet shift away from violence. Rather than welcome this, USIA saw the more peaceful Soviet stance as a greater threat since it could split the western allies. Indeed, the Soviet use of peace was regarded with distain since it came not out of any genuine regard for peace, but out of pragmatism- the Soviet leaders had moved towards a “...greater reliance on enticement, division, and duplicity in pursuit of their aims.” Violence had not been totally rejected either, and the 20th Party Congress made it plain that use of force was still acceptable in circumstances where socialism was threatened.⁶⁵

The “basic tasks” of USIA remained to make it clear to audiences that the fundamental aims of communism had not changed as a result of the 20th Party Congress. The Soviets may have set aside Stalinism, but as Dulles put it, this was only due to the Soviets realising that “...that their foreign policies encounter effective resistance when they are identified with the use of violence.” USIA quoted Dulles further:

We do not assume fatalistically that there can be no evolution within Russia, or that Russia's rulers will always be predatory. Some day Russia will be governed by men who will put the welfare of the Russian people above world conquest. It is our basic policy to advance the coming of that day.

But the guidance also quoted Dulles’ statement from 3 April:

The downgrading of Stalin does not of itself demonstrate that the Soviet regime has basically changed its domestic or foreign policies. The present rulers have, to be sure, somewhat modified or masked the harshness of their policies. But a dictatorship is a dictatorship whether it be that of one

⁶⁵ “Circular Airgram From the United States Information Agency to all USIS Missions”, April 11, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 9*, 567-578.

man or several.⁶⁶

USIA channelled Dulles to disseminate the idea abroad that there had been little change in the USSR since Stalin's death. According to USIA, the attack on Stalin and the Congress did nothing to change this until there were deeds that showed that the USSR could never return to Stalinism. Publicly, the only deed that the Eisenhower administration would accept as proof was a renouncement of communism.

Views of the Soviet Leadership

Prior to the 20th Party Congress there was speculation in the administration that Khrushchev could solidify his position, or even become a 'new Stalin' as a result of personnel changes. The Soviets altered the composition of both the Presidium and Party administration, however, Western policymakers found this inconclusive. These changes confirmed Khrushchev as the most powerful leader, but also failed to promote him to the level of dictator. The ideological changes and attacks on Stalin augured against anyone taking this step for themselves.

Khrushchev appointed a number of his protégés as candidate Presidium members; among them were Leonid Brezhnev, Dmitri Shepilov and Averky Aristov. However, the eleven full members remained the same.⁶⁷ According to Bohlen, these additions did not indicate substantial changes in the Party leadership, though they did confirm Khrushchev's continued predominance.⁶⁸ Although the leadership appeared to be continuing much along the lines as before the Congress, it was now more "youthful and less Stalinist".⁶⁹

Molotov's decline helped to confirm this. Policies he advocated were sharply criticised at the 20th Party Congress, not only by others, but even by himself. It had been noted for some time that he could lose his position as Foreign Minister, but if that were to happen, he would escape "Stalinist methods", and

⁶⁶ "Circular Airgram From the United States Information Agency to all USIS Missions", April 11, 1956, *ibid.*, 576.

⁶⁷ "Memo: W Armstrong to Dulles, w/DRS Report," February 29, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1931," February 28, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Biographic Report: 'Election of CPSU Top Leadership Shows Growth of Khrushchev's Personal Influence'," February 29, 1956, RG59, BEA, OSA, RRLDP, Box 1, Khrushchev, Nikita S., Feb 1956- June 1957, NARA.

⁶⁸ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1931."

⁶⁹ "Biographic Report: 'Election of CPSU...'"

would probably be “kicked upstairs” to a ceremonial position.⁷⁰ As far as the U.S. was concerned Molotov’s diminished prestige was a direct result of his continued affection for Stalinist foreign policy and reticence to accept the changes that were advocated by Khrushchev; notably the Austrian Treaty and rapprochement with Yugoslavia.⁷¹ He was described as failing to see the changed international situation since 1955, which necessitated a more flexible foreign policy, and flexibility was something Molotov was hardly associated with by American policymakers. In June 1956, he was sacked in favour of Dmitri Shepilov, though he retained his position as first deputy Prime Minister.⁷² He was neither killed nor exiled, and this was a distinct change from Stalinism.

As Molotov was nudged out Khrushchev was appointed to lead the CPSU Central Committee Bureau of RSFSR Affairs. The Bureau was intended to coordinate the activities of the RSFSR and the Soviet state. The State Department asserted that Khrushchev’s leadership of the Bureau made him the de facto head of the Russian Republic. Bohlen found it striking that Khrushchev was the only Presidium member appointed, but it was unclear if this was a political move, or merely an administrative one.⁷³ Even if it were the latter, few would have forgotten Stalin’s use of the Party administration to consolidate power.

Bohlen sincerely believed that Khrushchev did not seem to be any more than “chairman of the board”. Both Khrushchev and the other leaders were insistent that collective leadership was the only possible way forward.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Bohlen did not think the collective leadership was a charade: there

⁷⁰ Harrison Salisbury, “Molotov’s Status in Soviet Shrinks,” *New York Times*, February 28, 1956, HSP Box 172, Folder 16, CUL.

⁷¹ Harrison Salisbury, “Notes Re: Bohlen’s Thoughts on Destalinization,” April 1956, HSP Box 173, Folder 5, CUL.

⁷² “Despatch: Guthrie to Dept of State No.418,” March 15, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; Cable: Embassy USSR to DeptState, June 2, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 108-109; U.S. policymakers at the time certainly characterised Molotov as a hardliner due to their experiences with him. Molotov’s role in reforming the Soviet Union is still the subject of lively debate. See for example: “Roundtable Review of Geoffrey Roberts, ‘Molotov: Stalin’s Cold Warrior,’” *H-Diplo* XIV, no. 28 (April 22, 2013).

⁷³ “Biographic Report: ‘Election of CPSU...’”; “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1934,” February 29, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; The Foreign Office had expected the Congress to confirm Khrushchev’s predominance in a Stalinesque manner. Khrushchev’s leadership of the new bureau and its staffing by men loyal to him indicated an increase in Khrushchev’s power. “Cable: Aldrich to SecState, No.3657,” March 1, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

⁷⁴ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.2007, 1 of 2,” March 7, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

was a left and right opposition of sorts: Molotov was the 'left', and Malenkov, with his erstwhile support for consumer goods, was on the 'right'. As Bohlen saw it, the Presidium members were working towards the type of arrangement Lenin had overseen- members could disagree in private and not fear deadly retribution. Indeed, they would still be treated as comrades. Such a setup was not as outlandish as some in Washington thought: shared power had existed before, noted Bohlen, who cited the Doges of Venice as proof.⁷⁵ The decision not to allow another Stalin was likely taken when he died. But the decision to attack him may have come later. It was necessary, according to Bohlen, to destroy the Stalin myth in order to rebuild the Party and reduce police powers. Bohlen believed that destalinisation began soon after Stalin's death, and Beria's purge was a necessary part of it.⁷⁶ From this perspective, destalinisation was thought out well ahead of the Congress, even if only in a general manner and subject to the influence of events in the meantime.

Kennan vehemently disagreed. As a CIA consultant he provided several analyses of the 20th Party Congress to Frank Wisner and Allen Dulles.⁷⁷ To Kennan, this was not a group of men who were amiable or who had found a long-term solution to the leadership question. He also disagreed that destalinisation was planned in advance. Instead he put forward a more scandalous hypothesis: the current leaders had killed Stalin, or at least hastened his demise. The Soviet leaders knew that the truth would eventually emerge and destalinisation was part of a plan to reveal his crimes in order to make it seem as if they had saved Soviet Communism. But the shared guilt of the leaders in killing Stalin was a blessing and a curse. It was both a "bond of unity", and the "source of violent suspicions and disagreements".⁷⁸ One argument was how fast Stalin should be "deflated". Kennan thought this was behind the erratic nature of the anti-Stalin campaign since 1953 and the changes in the Soviet leadership: Beria was purged since he could not be trusted to keep quiet; Malenkov's demotion indicated he had not been fully aware of the plot; and Molotov was likely not involved at all and thus

⁷⁵ In contrast, Halle rejected collective leadership on the basis historical precedent. See chapter 4.

⁷⁶ Salisbury, "Notes Re: Bohlen's Thoughts on Destalinization"; Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, 398.

⁷⁷ *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24, 125, footnote 2.*

⁷⁸ "Memo: Wisner to DCI," May 8, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Folder: Stalin II, NARA; This document is also in: *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24, 96-98.*

needed to be removed.⁷⁹ This was highly conjectural. It was unlikely that Khrushchev and Bulganin could have killed Stalin without the Malenkov or Molotov knowing.

Bohlen consistently stressed that his vision of collective leadership did not mean there was total agreement in the Kremlin. Rather, he argued that there could be disagreement between the leaders until a decision was taken, much like Lenin's idea of 'democratic centralism'. Kennan in contrast argued that there was far less congeniality among the leaders. Ironically, Kennan's position was much more in line with DRS and the State Department in general now that he was no longer 'on the inside'.⁸⁰

Chapter Conclusion

As members of the Eisenhower administration gathered information about the growing campaign of official destalinisation they reacted in a number of ways. They often fit these new developments into existing frameworks: the notion of a ceaselessly hostile and aggressive Soviet Union was the most common of these. Indeed, even when various actors *did* recognise change on the part of the Soviet leaders, it was consistently emphasised in the same breath that any changes that made the Soviets outwardly less threatening could also make them more dangerous by increasing the attractiveness of Soviet Communism. The administration's emphasis on Soviet aggression, subversion and tactical change remained.

Some in the administration continued to hope for a violent power struggle in the Soviet leadership. Disagreements over the nature of the collective leadership contributed to uncertainty over the stability of the power structure in the Kremlin. In such a situation it was safer for the administration to hold course rather than entertain changed perspectives on the Soviet leaders. As the 20th Party Congress progressed, a consensus emerged in the administration that collective leadership was currently stable, though Khrushchev was the most powerful among the leaders. Therefore, the emphasis in the administration shifted towards study and exploitation of the events of the Congress and the Secret Speech.

⁷⁹ "Memo: Wisner to DCI."

⁸⁰ Robert Tucker, who had now left the Foreign Service, agreed with Kennan on the pace of destalinisation. He thought it would have been carried out in a more cohesive manner if the Presidium were united on the issue. Tucker, "The Politics of Soviet De-Stalinization," 576.

Specific emphasis was placed on disseminating outcomes of the Congress abroad that benefitted the image of the U.S. as democratic, peaceful and egalitarian and concurrently exposed the Kremlin as conspiratorial, dictatorial, expansionist, and above all, Stalinist.

The emphasis on the USSR remaining Stalinist was a key arrow in the U.S. propaganda quiver. The U.S. sought to eliminate any sympathy for the USSR by emphasising that the 20th Party Congress and Secret Speech exposed Stalin's heinous crimes, but that the current leadership was in fact no different and would revert to such methods when it suited. Outwardly this line made sense from a psychological warfare perspective. Yet it contradicted the stated administration policy of encouraging peaceful evolution of the Soviet system to the benefit of the West by attacking prospective sources of liberalisation. The administration was in a transition period. Some carried on with the same image of the Soviets that they had fostered since the beginning of the Cold War. But others, most importantly Dulles, began to see the possibility of lasting change in the USSR. This was a change in perception that would become clearer in the coming months.

Chapter 6: Public Suspicions and Private Doubts

From 1953 destalinisation proceeded in fits and starts, but the 20th Party Congress ushered in a new level of urgency to the campaign against Stalin. The American administration quickly became aware that the Soviets were destroying anything representative of Stalin's legacy. But conclusions on this varied. Some thought the U.S. should wait to see what the Secret Speech and destalinisation represented; while others were more bullish and ready to dismiss it as yet another ploy to undermine the West.

A "Trojan Corpse"?

Given the timing of the 20th Party Congress one of the most instantly recognised symbols of the attack on Stalin was the lack of commemoration on the anniversary of his death on 5 March.¹ Instead, portraits and statues of Stalin were systematically removed across the USSR and there were reports that his body would soon be removed from the Lenin-Stalin mausoleum. At the Museum of the Revolution, tour guides were specifically instructed to inform visitors viewing a painting of Lenin's arrival at the Finland Station in 1917 that contrary to the depiction, Stalin was *not* present at that time.² On 1st May, Stalin's portrait was absent, replaced by yet more images of Lenin.³ Anything that bore Stalin's name was rebadged: The Marx-Engels-Lenin-Stalin Institute (always a mouthful) was now the 'Institute of Marxism-Leninism'. The Stalin automobile plant in Moscow became the IA Likachev factory. These were only the most high profile re-namings so far, with more sure to come.⁴

The State Department and Moscow embassy were stunned.⁵ But the danger that destalinisation presented to the Soviets was immediately apparent. Francis Stevens, head Eastern European Affairs at the State Department thought destalinisation was an incredibly dangerous ideological problem. It presented

¹ "Despatch: Guthrie to Dept of State No.418," 413.

² "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.2062," March 13, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.2101," March 17, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA.

³ "IR-1912.3: Current Status of the Anti-Stalin Campaign in the Soviet Bloc," May 5, 1956, RG59, ExSec, SSF 1953-61, Box 43, Soviet and Related Problems (Stalinism), NARA.

⁴ Stalingrad had not yet been renamed Volgograd. "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.2933," June 27, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

⁵ "Despatch: Guthrie to Dept of State, No.413," March 12, 1956, RG59, CDF 1955-59, 761.00, C0016, Reel 4, NARA; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.2101"; "IR-1912.3."

serious dilemmas for the Presidium and there were bound to be disagreements about how to proceed. Molotov, Kaganovich and Voroshilov seemed to remain supportive of Stalinism. The act of moving Stalin's body raised myriad questions about the unity of the leadership. It also questioned the unity of the Communist movement and Soviet Bloc.⁶

Though the administration did not yet have a copy of the Secret Speech, it was not hard to discern that the 20th Party Congress had been the opening salvo in an effort to destroy the myth of Stalin's infallibility. Stevens indicated that the course so far was to divide Stalin's acts into 'good' and 'bad'. Industrialisation and the strength of the military was deemed to have been a 'good' part of Stalin's legacy and the State Department noted that these policies have been continued by his successors.⁷ Conclusions such as these highlighted that the idea that there had been no practical change in Moscow either since Stalin's death or as a result of destalinisation. Assertions of continued industrialisation and Soviet military might insulated those making them against charges of being soft on Communism, or were a reflection of a stubborn refusal to acknowledge the Soviet changes since 1953. The fact that such notions are found in analyses of destalinisation shows just how deeply engrained they were.

The State Department recognised the danger involved for the Soviet leaders and concluded that the Soviet public had been prepared for the speech through the decline of references to Stalin and removal of Stalinist symbols since his death. Yet it understood the difference between the anti-Stalin campaign since 1953 and the concerted effort at destalinisation now. Since 1953 Stalin had been sidelined or simply forgotten. But since the Congress he was actively demonised. This carried risks not only for the stability of the Soviet system, but also for the leaders themselves, whom the State Department knew could be implicated in Stalin's crimes.⁸

⁶ "'Destalinization', Lambert to Gruin," March 29, 1956, TCD, Box 1, Folder 19, HL.

⁷ "'Campaign Against Stalin,'" March 21, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA; "Memo: Armstrong to A Dulles with Attachment 'The Campaign Against Stalin,'" March 21, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 14, Anti-Stalin Campaign, NARA.

⁸ "'Campaign Against Stalin,'" "Memo: Armstrong to A Dulles with Attachment 'The Campaign Against Stalin.'"

Even so, the State Department was unsure if the speech had been planned in advance, or if Khrushchev had made the shocking accusations without clearing them with the other leaders first.⁹ Given the personal and political implications of destalinisation there surely must have been compelling reasons for it. Yet the State Department noted that the Soviets seemed to move out of choice, rather than compulsion. There did not appear to be internal or foreign pressures for such a drastic move. Indeed, destalinisation seemed to increase pressure in both arenas. Therefore, denouncing Stalin must have been a gamble on the favourable reactions of a few key groups; intellectuals, managers and the military; all of who suffered under Stalin. The managerial class especially was hoped to benefit from the removal of Stalin's shadow, which would allow the economy to benefit by increasing initiative. Abroad the attack on Stalin could have the effect of increasing the respectability of the Soviet Union and the model it represented.¹⁰ The Eisenhower administration had seen such motivations since 1955 in the ideological and economic offensive toward the developing world. Destalinisation was in this respect viewed as another way to weaken the West and compete in the Cold War.

Bohlen briefed the Office of Eastern European Affairs and members of the PPS that some groups would benefit, but also stressed the bewilderment of much of the Soviet population. He noted the obstacles that destalinisation put in the way of one-man rule and the bolstering affect it had on collective leadership. The philosophical and historical questions that would need to be addressed would help form the basis of a more stable collective leadership. Bohlen was almost cavalier about the dangers to the Soviet leaders, although he remarked that destalinisation may have opened Pandora's box, he did not foresee serious problems for Party discipline.¹¹

While Bohlen was in Washington Counsellor Walter Walmsley watched the proceedings from Moscow. He described destalinisation as a broad effort to reinvigorate the Party and economy. It amounted to "shock treatment" that would allow self-criticism and "communist action"; these were key "Leninist

⁹ "'Campaign Against Stalin.'"

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Memo: Davis (PPS) to Bowie, April 11, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 93-95 This document is also in; "Memo: Davis to Bowie," April 11, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 109, USSR, NARA.

norms” that had died out under Stalin. Indeed, Walmsley saw destalinisation not so much as anti-Stalin, as ‘anti-Stalinism’. By attacking Stalinism the Party was reclaiming legality, morality and omniscience. Such actions, in combination with reduced police power, would help win back the support of the intelligentsia, scientists, managers and the military. This would encourage freedom of thought and debate that could be good for the economy. Of course this all presented difficulties for the leadership. In particular how to control debate, especially since by the very nature of destalinisation, Stalinist methods of control would be awkward rely upon.¹²

Francis Stevens emphasised many of these same ideas to a *Time* correspondent. The motivation of destalinisation appeared to be primarily domestic. Since 1953 the Soviet leaders had been trying to convince the population that they were not responsible for Stalin’s crimes. Lenin presented a useful way to re-establish an ideological foundation for their rule after repudiating the man who was responsible for their rise through the Party ranks. But Stevens remained unapologetic in his continued rejection of change in the Kremlin: although violence and terror would not be used to enforce the new Party line, this did not amount to the end of Stalinism: communist objectives of expansionism and world domination remained in place.¹³

Stevens’ thoughts reflected wider thinking in the State Department that sought to “[d]rive home the point that denouncing Stalin does not remove Stalinism.”¹⁴ Therefore, the response was to maintain its guard through alliances and encourage the cohesion of the free world. This was especially important, as one of the points of destalinisation was to promote the ‘decency’ of Soviet Communism and thusly attract neutralists and leftists. The U.S. should respond by trying to minimise any acceptance of this increase in Soviet ‘decency’ by pointing out that Khrushchev and other leaders all owed their positions to Stalin and that basic Stalinist policies like collectivisation and the occupation of Eastern Europe remained in force. Indeed, the Bureau of European Affairs argued that the

¹² Cable: Embassy in the Soviet Union to DeptState, April 11, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 91-93; Cable: Embassy in the Soviet Union to the DeptState, April 9, 1956, *ibid.*, 88-91.

¹³ “Smashing the Stalin Icon’, Beal to Gruin,” March 22, 1956, TCD, Box 1, Folder 17, HL.

¹⁴ “Suggested Outline for Paper on Anti-Stalin Campaign in USSR,” March 23, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA.

very methods of denunciation that the current leaders were using against Stalin were the same that Stalin had used to consolidate power.¹⁵ Similar ideas were being used in public information campaigns. One objective was to sow confusion within the communist movement. This could easily be claimed as a 'success', since Khrushchev and the Soviet leaders were doing this quite effectively themselves. Another goal was to encourage the Soviet leaders to move "down less dangerous paths" and "[m]inimise and acceptance abroad of Soviet respectability".¹⁶ But consistently attacking Soviet reforms through propaganda was not an effective way to encourage this.

This in particular exposed the shortsighted and contradictory nature of the U.S. response. The State Department rejected destalinisation on the basis of the continued occupation of the satellites and existence of basic communist agricultural policies such as collectivisation. *Pravda* asserted that these were some of Stalin's 'good' accomplishments.¹⁷ This illustrated to the hardliners in the State Department that nothing had changed. But the continuation of some policies also illustrated the inability of many in the State Department to differentiate between communism and Stalinism. Furthermore, Dulles and Eisenhower consistently rejected changes that made the USSR less Stalinist that had occurred since 1953. Often the reaction towards the 20th Party Congress both inside the administration and in public continued along these lines and sought to trivialise destalinisation. Indeed, this may have helped with the goal of preventing increased respectability for the USSR. But the campaign to discredit the changes, indeed the very existence of a goal to reduce respect for the Soviet leaders was counterproductive in helping the Soviets evolve in directions desirable for the U.S. The State Department failed to grasp the gravity of the changes to the communist movement. This was not a failing of U.S. intelligence- any number of former Party members in the West could have told the administration that destalinisation practically amounted to decide. Rather it pointed to a mindset that rejected Soviet changes since Stalin's death as matter of course.

¹⁵ "The Emerging Communist Line...", March 24, 1956; "Suggested Outline for Paper on Anti-Stalin Campaign in USSR."

¹⁶ "Suggested Outline for Paper on Anti-Stalin Campaign in USSR."

¹⁷ "USSR National Affairs," March 28, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 24, Memorandum 1956-56, 2, NARA.

Harrison Salisbury laid out what destalinisation meant for Soviet grand strategy. He characterised it as an “all out attack on Stalin...[i]t [was] no longer possible to discuss what has happened in Moscow since the death of Stalin in terms of ‘tactical change’ or ‘strategic’ manoeuvre.” Such a statement was at odds with the interpretation of communist doctrine and Soviet motivations as intrinsically subversive. But after spending the better part of his life in the USSR, both during Stalin’s lifetime and since 1953, Salisbury was well placed to skewer such conclusions. Indeed, as Dulles and others in the State Department repeated, the “ultimate goals” of the Soviets remained unchanged. Salisbury’s felt such a drastic course of action was needed to remove the element of fear in Soviet society. This could help increase economic productivity. What was striking was his illustration of the manner in which destalinisation was being carried out:

There is a concentration on extermination of every symbol of Stalin’s personality that bears strong emotional overtones. No political factor or possibility of political gain seems to explain the spirit with which the Soviet leaders are acting. There is more than a suggestion of deep hate. If they individually escaped Stalin’s purges by a hair’s breadth, this might explain why, figuratively, they are pointing their ideological guns at his dead corpse and firing until the chambers are empty.¹⁸

Destalinisation would not be carried out in such a manner if it were merely tactical.

Another report prepared for the OCB Special Working Group on Stalinism (SWGS) noted the profound disbelief, anger and confusion that the denunciation of Stalin created, especially among the fifty percent of Soviet citizens born since 1929 when “Stalin worship” began. But these feelings were especially dangerous to the Party, which had seen its largest growth in the post-war period under Stalin. The report noted that the leaders foresaw such difficulties. Yet this was a huge adjustment for Party members to make- they would either have to accept that their previously unquestioned fealty to Stalin was no longer possible, or they would have to completely suppress their doubt of the changes. There were serious reservations among the OCB and OIR whether the ‘little Stalin’s’ in the Satellites could adjust quickly enough. It would be necessary to instruct Party members that it was acceptable to criticise Stalin, but nothing that was current

¹⁸ Harrison Salisbury, “The Whys of the All-Out Attack on Stalin,” *New York Times*, March 25, 1956, HSP, Box 172, Folder 16, CUL.

policy. The report asserted that the leadership must have felt confident in the stability of the Soviet regime to initiate such a course.¹⁹ This may have been true to an extent: they would not have started such a process without knowing that they could ultimately control events- but they still realised it was a gamble. This was what indicated that the leaders might have felt that the Soviet system would be less secure if it continued on its current heading. To be sure, the report noted that much of the effect of destalinisation in terms of removing his image and public legacy could have been achieved by continuing to ignore Stalin, as had been largely the case since 1953. Clearly the leaders felt that some sort of shock was necessary in order to safeguard the system in the medium to long term. The OCB also concluded that the reasoning was domestic, and intended to liberalise society and encourage enthusiasm and initiative in the Party and economy. But the OCB noted something that others had not: just as Stalin could have been 'forgotten', why not simply encourage initiative and demonstrate that it would be rewarded? The answer seemed to be that there was a need to cut the ground from anyone in a position of authority who remained wedded to Stalinist methods. By doing so, anyone who opposed liberalisation could be denounced as a Stalinist.²⁰

Yet certain policies pursued by Stalin continued to be supported by the present leaders. As mentioned, these were not Stalinist *per se*, but rather part of Soviet Communism that would have likely been pursued by any Soviet leader in the absence of Stalin, although perhaps in a different manner. The occupation and domination of Eastern Europe, collectivisation and emphasis on defence and heavy industry fell into this category. As such, the Soviet leaders sought to divide Stalin's life into 'good' and 'bad'. Rather it was the cult of personality and self-glorification, disregard of collective leadership, and the dominating power of the secret police- the consequences of which were the death of thousands of loyal Party members that drew the most criticism from Khrushchev and the other leaders. The administration was well aware of this division. The U.S. sought to

¹⁹ "OCB Working Paper: The Desecration of Stalin," March 27, 1956, RG59, ExSec, SSF 1953-61, Box 43, Soviet and Related Problems (Stalinism), NARA; This paper was later published and circulated as: "OIR Intelligence Brief 1902," March 30, 1956, RG59 PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 110, S/P Staff Meeting Minutes, 1956, NARA.

²⁰ "The Desecration of Stalin."

develop highlight this in order to facilitate the demise of Soviet Communist credibility.²¹

The distinction drawn by the Soviet leaders was done so not only out the necessity for some continuity, but also out of conviction. These 'good' accomplishments of 'Stalin' were not only things that the new leaders were deeply involved in, but also truly believed. This appeared highly contradictory to many in the Eisenhower administration, not least Dulles. Since Soviet Communism was often seen as a monolith it was unthinkable that they should so thoroughly discredit some of the actions of Stalin while continuing to support others. Thus, Dulles publicly stated that the Soviets were still Stalinists, regardless of destalinisation. But he was also aware that he could no longer dismiss changes in the USSR out of hand; the 20th Party Congress offered evidence that was too compelling. Dulles qualified his comments by stating that the existence of such "liberalizing tendencies" encouraged hope for peaceful change in the USSR.²² This statement cannot be dismissed as rhetoric. Dulles was coming to terms with the fact that destalinisation represented something monumental. But both his long held perceptions of the Soviet leaders as cagey conspirators, buttressed by his innate cautiousness, bid him to continue to play the sceptic until the evidence was more fully developed.

Dulles' reaction to destalinisation at this time was understandable given his previous responses to changes in the USSR. Indeed, analysis from the PPS gave a number of reasons for the U.S. to remain on guard against the Soviets. In an exhaustive PPS report on the 20th Party Congress Richard Davis concluded that the Soviet leaders were still confident in the Soviet system and ultimate victory of Communism.²³ The Soviets were still trying to divide the West. Peaceful co-existence was one manner of doing this: 'peace' simply meant the "...maximum possible pressures for the exploitation of the weaknesses and contradictions in the

²¹ "USSR National Affairs"; "Memo: Beam to UnderSecState," March 28, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA; Jacob Beam to Robert Murphy, April 3, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 24, Memorandum 1956-56, 2, NARA.

²² "DeptState PR-171," April 3, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML; Document also in: "Dept of State Press Release: The Downgrading of Stalin," April 3, 1956, RG59 PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 110, USSR, NARA.

²³ Richard Davis, "General Implications for U.S. Policy of Soviet Party Congress," April 6, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 113, S/P Working Papers, April 1956, 2 of 2, NARA.

outside world in order to enhance Soviet power.” The softening of Soviet Communist ideology at the Congress was intended to help achieve both these goals by making the Soviet system more attractive to people in both the West and in the developing world. But Khrushchev also stated that war was still possible if unleashed by capitalists, thus the USSR needed to maintain a strong military.²⁴

Davis’ summary of Soviet objectives after the 20th Party Congress would have led many to conclude that there had been no changes of substance. Those in the administration interpreted the change towards a less aggressive manner of foreign policy as a threatening development. Thus, the changes of the Congress were brushed aside and fit into the framework that had been developed since 1953: a lessening of hostility from the Soviets meant little if they were still communists, and in fact could make them more dangerous. Davis cited events such as the Czechoslovakian Coup, Berlin blockade, rift with Tito and the Korean War. These caused the West to band together. The subsequent isolation hurt the Soviet economy and blackened the image of the USSR abroad. The new leaders concluded that they need to not only abandon such policies, but that Stalinism was untenable without Stalin himself. As Davis put it:

...collective rule...needed a broader base of support and greater freedom and flexibility in action than Stalin's orthodoxy and one-man rule could allow. From the fundamental fact that the Stalinist system has been replaced by a collective dictatorship flow most of recent Soviet developments.²⁵

The adoption of peaceful coexistence was an example of this flexibility. But it was also a reflection of necessity due to the nuclear reality. The realisation that war could not be allowed to occur made revisions in Soviet doctrine necessary. Davis emphasised that such revisions did not mean a change in Soviet objectives. The Soviets would still seek advantage over the West.²⁶

Though Davis’ conclusions about Soviet intentions were much the same as those mooted over the past three years, he encouraged a different response. Remaining opposed to Soviet objectives did not mean the U.S. must reject all aspects of change in the USSR. Davis acknowledged that the recent developments warranted a more flexible position. The U.S. could not reject destalinisation out of

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

hand. Davis did not think the Soviet position a short term one. Though he maintained Soviet objectives were the same he also asserted that the changes were *not* tactical. The revisions in Soviet foreign policy and ideology over the past three years made a return to Stalinism unlikely. But whereas the U.S. had been good at resisting Stalin's harsh tactics, Davis now emphasised the need for the U.S. to develop more flexible policies in response. Davis' suggestions seemed to have been written for Dulles himself. They were innovative and realistic:

Less emphasis should be given to conjuring up the vision of a Kremlin bent on Communist conquest and world domination at some unspecified time and more to attaining an appreciation by the peoples of the world of the basic power factors which necessitate that the free nations maintain their guard at least until such a time as a workable system of disarmament has provided assurance against any sudden breach of the peace.

Davis argued that the U.S. could not simply dismiss destalinisation "...as merely a cover for the same old predatory ends. It has been designed with too many built-in attractions for us to wave it lightly aside..." Davis concluded that although there was no change in Soviet goals, the U.S. could not reject destalinisation outright. The U.S. should investigate whether Soviet positions that were based on Stalin's policies were shifting.²⁷ Davis viewed destalinisation as making peaceful change in the USSR more likely, and the U.S. could only encourage such a development.

In public neither Dulles nor Deputy Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Robert Murphy seemed to be influenced by Davis' conclusions. Speaking to the American Society of Newspaper Editors Murphy dutifully repeated the position Dulles made on 3 April: the downgrading of Stalin did not mean the Soviets had made any basic change to domestic or foreign policies. The attack on Stalin did not alter the "committee dictatorship", or the Soviet adherence to Marxism-Leninism. All that had changed were methods, and the West needed to remember that less reliance on violence and coercion did not mean their basic objectives had altered. Murphy also dismissed significant Soviet foreign policy moves over the past three years: the Austrian treaty, rapprochement with Tito and conciliatory offers toward Japan and Germany. All this was striking to say the least, but paled in comparison to Murphy's argument that all of these actions

²⁷ Ibid.

were only taken to gain advantage over the West.²⁸ Ironically, the aforementioned Soviet foreign policy moves were some of the exact things that Eisenhower demanded in his Chance for Peace speech before the same audience in 1953. But now that the Soviets demonstrated the goodwill Eisenhower demanded, it was disregarded on the basis that the Soviets remained communist. This prevented the U.S. from taking advantage of the changes in the Soviet system to encourage the evolutionary change that was laid out as policy in NSC-5505.

Different views were expressed in private. Rather than rejecting destalinisation outright, Bohlen told the SWGS that the 20th Party Congress and Secret Speech presented a new level of anger towards Stalin. He cautioned the SWGS to adopt a 'wait and see' approach. The U.S. should only respond in its information campaigns by asking what had been done to prevent the emergence of another Stalin. This was one of the same lines used by Dulles. In contrast, Bohlen did *not* recommend that the U.S. actively cast doubt on destalinisation or question its motives, in sharp contrast to Dulles and much U.S. information output thus far.²⁹ This omission was telling. Bohlen was aware that if he made a point of disagreeing with Dulles that his suggestions would likely be rejected. It was better to remain mute on Dulles' actions and instead offer a different course of action towards destalinisation. In this case it was better to allow destalinisation to proceed, possibly to the benefit of the U.S., than to openly attack it and risk playing into the hands of the Soviets.

In contrast to Dulles, who credited the changes in the USSR to Western policies, and to specialists in the State Department who thought destalinisation was motivated by domestic issues, Allen Dulles developed a different view. The Dulles brothers looked at the same events and drew different conclusions. In the Cold War so far, Foster saw the victory of Western policies and cohesion. The West was *proactive* and forced the Soviet system to change. In contrast, Allen saw the West *reacting* to Soviet aggression. Allen Dulles figured that the Soviet leaders knew Stalin's manner of foreign policy had definitively failed, thus forcing such a fundamental change in course.

²⁸ "Draft Speech by Robert Murphy," April 11, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin II, NARA.

²⁹ "Memo: Ad Hoc Working Group on Stalinism," April 12, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin I, NARA.

But this alone did not explain destalinisation. The Kremlin could have simply let Stalin fade away. Rather, the leaders needed to increase support from key parts of the population in order to solidify their power base and stimulate the economy. To this end, Allen Dulles saw destalinisation as mollifying the Army by acknowledging Stalin's murder of thousands of officers. The Soviet economy also needed to increase productivity to compete with the rest of the world. This required more education, and specifically more emphasis on science. Stalin had set science back by promoting quacks like Trofim Lysenko. With the scientific method firmly reinstated, science could no longer be moulded in service of communism. This, along with more people holding advanced degrees in science, Dulles concluded, could result in questioning of the Soviet system. Attacking Stalin was in this respect a way to encourage innovation and education that could improve the economy, but also to direct toward Stalin frustration that would normally be directed towards the Party. But Allen Dulles acknowledged that even this was fraught with danger. Allowing open questioning and criticism of Stalin could easily lead to criticism of the current leaders and Party. He noted that *Pravda* made it clear that only criticism of Stalin's deeds- and only specific ones at that would be tolerated. This led Dulles to conclude that:

A dead and dishonored Stalin, therefore, is likely to be merely a device— here possibly a Trojan corpse rather than a Trojan horse— with which the long suffering Russian people are, I fear, to be deceived in their expectation of a freer and better life.

Allen Dulles had thought this all through carefully. But he still concluded that destalinisation was at root a way of maintaining the Party monopoly over all aspects of the state, something Dulles characterised as Stalinism rebadged as Leninism. Even after denouncing Stalin the Soviet leaders still maintained a police state with powers of life and death over anyone who dissented. The leaders could return to terror "like ducks to water". Stalin had come to power through collective leadership, noted Dulles, and little prevented such a situation from occurring again.³⁰

It was this sort of public criticism of destalinisation that both Bohlen and Salisbury decried. But the best summary of the administrations perceptions of

³⁰ "Speech to Los Angeles World Affairs Council: 'Purge of Stalinism'," April 13, 1956, AWDP, Box 105, Folder 1, ML.

destalinisation thus far came from another dissenting figure, Louis Halle. He kept in touch with numerous figures in the administration, the most influential of which was Bowie.³¹ Though Halle's discord with Dulles and others of the 'liberation' stripe precluded him having any influence on policymaking, he provided his expertise to the press. He was jointly asked for an essay on destalinisation by the editors of the French monthly *Preuves*, the British review *Encounter*, and German magazine *Der Monat*. His essay was suitably cerebral and reflected his new place in academia (it began with a Gandalf quotation from Tolkien's *The Two Towers*). But it addressed a central question- one that the initial response of the Eisenhower administration to destalinisation avoided: what was communism?

Communism is a word. As such it has not changed in one syllable or letter since the Communist Manifesto of 1847. But what is "the thing" itself? It was one thing in Russia in 1919. It was not quite the same thing in Russia in 1928. It was something else again in 1949. Is it what Lenin said it was, what Trotsky said it was, what Stalin said it was, or what Krushchev [sic] says it is? Is it the same in China as in Russia, in Russia as in Yugoslavia?³²

Communism had become a loaded term and was preventing policymakers from appreciating the changes in the Soviet Union. The insistence by Dulles and others that the Soviets leaders remained wedded to the goals of 'communism', and therefore their objectives were unchanged, was a useless interpretation. "Ultimate objectives", Halle argued, "exist only in the imagination". What was important was what a power did in pursuit of those goals. Halle thought the West should be to find out whether it was still Kremlin policy to impose communism by force and subversion as it was under Stalin, or, whether the new leaders were truly confining themselves to legitimate forms of competition.³³

Halle was right: it did not matter that the Soviets still desired to spread communism. Nothing the U.S. could do would change this. What mattered was whether they were pursuing their goals in a more liberal manner that would be conducive to Western objectives. Though there were clear indications of this the administration fell back on the established response to change in the Soviet

³¹ "Letter: Halle to Stevenson," July 9, 1956, LJHP, Box 6, 6.1-Correspondence St, UVSC; "Letter: Halle to Stevenson," August 9, 1956, LJHP, Box 6, 6.1-Correspondence St, UVSC.

³² Louis Halle, "Symposium on 'What Is Happening in Soviet Russia?'" April 11, 1956, LJHP, Box 10, Corres. on Symposium What is happening in Russia, UVSC.

³³ Ibid.

Union, that destalinisation could only be to the detriment of the West. This prevented any useful examination. Part of this failure was due not only to the cautious nature of figures like Dulles, but also of the tendency of bureaucracies to maintain course in the face of incomplete or conflicting information. Such caution had existed since 1953. Domestic politics in the earlier years of the administration made it very dangerous to risk anything on Soviet changes. But that was no longer the case. Sustained signals of change and a desire to improve relations from the Soviets, and the decline of McCarthy and rabid anti-communists in Congress, meant that Soviet changes could have been considered more when formulating U.S. policy. Instead policymakers hesitated because of outdated perceptions of the Soviet leaders. This was slowly changing, but only in private.

Indeed, the public comments of State Department officials and U.S. information publications followed the line set out in Dulles' 3 April speech. They dismissed the changes inherent in destalinisation and claimed that Stalinism persisted. By the middle of April officials were instructed that they might develop other lines of argument in their public statements. The expanded line, however, only added to the old one in limited ways. Officials were encouraged to disseminate the line that the Soviets were only embarking on destalinisation for their own economic and diplomatic benefit.³⁴ Therefore, the public response of the administration to destalinisation remained the same since the 20th Party Congress: it consisted of scepticism and demands for reforms that proved destalinisation as more than a tactic. Continuity was drawn between Stalin and the current leaders, and between Stalinism and current policies. The administration was extremely cautious with public opinion, and it was careful to craft a response that seemed to satisfy those that sought better relations with the USSR while hedging against any accusations of softness toward communism from Cold War hawks. But by 1956 the administration had much more leeway in its relations towards the Soviets than it had in 1953 or 1954. The Geneva Conference, even if it resulted in little progress on concrete issues, did present the Soviets as desirous of better relations and committed to avoiding war. If both Dulles and Eisenhower pressed for a positive exploration of what destalinisation meant for U.S.-Soviet relations they

³⁴ "Memo: Beam to Murphy," April 16, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin Committee, NARA.

could have accelerated the improvement of relations that finally emerged in 1958-59. Certainly Eisenhower, as a military hero, and Dulles, as the Christian moralist and strident anti-communist, could not have been seriously attacked for being soft on communism; they had their record of the previous three years to prove it. Instead, their long-held perceptions of the Soviets as devious and conspiratorial prevented them from making any quick adjustments in policy. The resulting middle-of-the-road approach limited the ability of the administration to take advantage of destalinisation in pursuit of its goal of a more liberal Soviet system.

A Changed Man

Dulles had begun to publicly note the liberalising possibilities of the 20th Party Congress. In private he agreed that destalinisation was a serious change. But he remained characteristically cautious. He noted the possibilities of destalinisation, but rather than seizing them, he focussed on minimizing the dangers. It was reminiscent of the lack of response to Stalin's death. The U.S. now found itself in a similar situation: serious changes in the USSR presented possible avenues of either improving relations, or for exploitation. But neither course was followed due to Dulles cautious nature, and engrained perceptions. Political and bureaucratic rivalries also hindered greater initiative. CD Jackson documented this, which was fitting since he left the administration citing a lack of action in prosecuting the Cold War. He met with Dulles in mid-April; though unbeknownst to Dulles the meeting was in fact preparation for a possible *Time* hatchet job on the administration's foreign policy. Confiding in Jackson, (with whom, despite his differences in approach, he was friends) he noted that many Americans wanted to see a more active U.S. foreign policy. The problem was both a lack of presidential follow through, and the blocking of initiatives by members of the administration and State Department who were close to the president: in this case Charlie Wilson and Herbert Hoover Jr. The latter, as Undersecretary of State, often used Dulles' absences to stall or reverse instructions. According to Dulles, Hoover was even insubordinate in his presence.

But this was not so much of an issue as was the lack of useful ideas. Dulles ranted about the failure of the bureaucracy. There was no shortage of "idea mechanisms", but everything had to be reduced to a common denominator in NSC meetings. In addition, Eisenhower's enthusiasm for 'coordination' meant

that various departments were able to weigh in on foreign policy matters, thus hindering the State Department. Excessive communication was throttling enthusiasm.³⁵ There was no lack of irony in Dulles' complaints. He had done more than anyone to destroy morale in the State Department through his attention to politics at the expense of the Foreign Service. Ambassadors were frequently left uninformed of new policies, yet Dulles complained about having to show key ambassadors copies of his speeches prior to delivering them. He lashed out at Eisenhower, saying that the president had the mandate to do almost anything, but instead wasted his first months in office.³⁶ Dulles conveniently forgot his own cautious nature and his frequent role in stymieing various initiatives.

It is unlikely that if Eisenhower or Dulles had *really* wanted to accomplish something innovative in foreign policy it would have been impossible. Jackson challenged Dulles on exactly this point. Dulles countered that his only ally was Eisenhower, who was (with no hint of irony) an indecisive ally at that. Dulles painted Eisenhower as a man who "likes to be liked", and firmly resisted putting forth any ideas that could encounter political resistance before the election. Confrontation was not Eisenhower's style anyhow; he aimed to lead through persuasion.³⁷ But Dulles reserved most of his scorn for the "Humphrey-Dodge axis".³⁸ Both men were known for their strict fiscal conservatism, and locked horns with Dulles over foreign aid. Their obstructionism was even more ironic since Eisenhower appointed both based upon not only their banking and business experience, but also their alleged efficiency.³⁹

Dulles was frustrated at his colleagues for hampering his ability to wage the Cold War. But he was also conflicted about the changes in the USSR. He had come to a different view of the Cold War and Soviet methods since Stalin's death. He reminisced to Jackson about building a bomb shelter for he and his wife in 1951, but said he would not consider building one now. The struggle had shifted

³⁵ CDJ to Henry Luce, April 16, 1956, CDJP, Box 71, Luce, Henry R. and Clare, 1956 (5), DDEL.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ A comprehensive analysis of Eisenhower's leadership style is: Greenstein, *The Hidden-Hand*.

³⁸ CDJ to Henry Luce, April 21, 1956, CDJP, Box 71, Luce, Henry R. and Clare, 1956 (5), DDEL; CDJ to Luce, April 16, 1956. Joseph Dodge was Special Assistant to the President and Chairman of the Council on Foreign Economic Policy.

³⁹ See: Ira Kaufman, *Trade and Aid: Eisenhower's Foreign Economic Policy, 1953-1961* (London: Johns Hopkins, 1982), 12-57, esp. pages 30, 36.

away from a military angle and towards hearts and minds. This presented dangers and opportunities:

So long as the Soviets under Stalin continued to behave so badly in public, it was relatively easy for our side to maintain a certain social ostracism toward them... Now all of a sudden the outward Soviet appearance, mood, behavior, has materially changed...it is becoming extremely difficult to maintain the ostracism – *and maybe we should not even want to maintain it.*⁴⁰

Dulles' questioning of whether the Soviets should be kept at arms length was a revelation. In private he was no longer rejecting Soviet changes out of hand. Indeed, he was asserting the fundamental nature of the changes for the Soviet regime: "...this change is not superficial, is not limited to a few speeches and *Pravda* editorials. It goes quite deep." In the face of the rehabilitation of communists, rapprochement with Tito and acceptance of national roads to socialism he recognised that it would be increasingly difficult for the U.S. to claim that destalinisation meant nothing. Dulles even claimed to have predicted the changes in the USSR in his writings:

Ten years ago, in my article in LIFE, I said that if we could stay with this thing long enough and solidly enough, there would come a time when important internal changes would occur in the Soviet Union, and that any change from the rigid Stalin police state would probably be a step forward. Well, that has come to pass. Six years ago in my book, I wrote that it was conceivable that at some time the rulers of Russia might publicly repudiate Stalin and all his works. Well, that has come to pass also.⁴¹

Dulles' 'prescience' was actually the result of vague language and hindsight. If he had meant such claims he would have been more inquisitive about destalinisation immediately after Stalin's death. Instead it took the revelations of the 20th Party Congress for him to truly question his own perceptions, and he came to a vastly different interpretation of the Soviets than he had in 1953 when he asserted the U.S. must destroy the USSR.

Dulles acceptance of destalinisation was not yet firm enough to express fully in public. A week after his meeting with Jackson he addressed the Associated Press and read out a list of changes in Soviet foreign policy since 1953, including the latest ones due to destalinisation. He continued to convey that it

⁴⁰ CDJ to Luce, April 16, 1956. Emphasis added. Dulles made sure that the bomb shelter was large enough not only for he and his wife, but also for his documents.

⁴¹ Ibid.

was the unity and pressure of the free world on the Soviets that had caused destalinisation. The Soviets were determined to see built communism throughout the world and possessed enormous military capabilities. Therefore, it would be foolish for the West to lower its guard. Indeed, Dulles repeated his conviction that the “moment of greatest danger would be the moment when we relaxed”, and that the West should not “treat the prospect of success as itself a complete success”. Dulles could not be expected to change course quickly, but some of his remarks were revelatory: “[t]o say that is not to say that we should act as though nothing had happened. We cannot and would not set the clock back. There is no longer the mood of fear that gripped the free world...” Dulles thought this left the West in a tricky position: the West should give destalinisation a chance, but this also gave the Soviet leaders more chance for “mischief”.⁴² At a press conference the following day Dulles welcomed the official sanctioning of national roads to socialism. For Dulles, Titoism represented a shift away from international communism towards national communism: the U.S. could have normal relations with the latter.⁴³ Dulles was no longer suspicious of every Soviet move.

Dulles was concerned with both the ideological and political changes in the USSR. The problem was that he continued to mix his messages as a result of his own confusion about the permanency of destalinisation. His statements about Soviet changes and how the U.S. should perceive and respond to them were frequently contradictory; often times in the same speech. In the days before his speech on 24 April both he and Eisenhower stressed the need to keep hatred of the Soviets simmering and that the basic concepts of Communism had not changed.⁴⁴ The changes wrought by destalinisation left him deeply conflicted about Soviet Communism, and what it meant for the U.S. Dulles and Eisenhower did not know what to do. They were obfuscating the issue, deliberately or otherwise, in order to buy time.

The insistence that the U.S. must maintain its vigilance while it examined the Soviet changes was a natural way for the administration to protect itself from any Soviet reversals or accusations of being soft on the Soviets. Indeed,

⁴² “DeptState PR-210,” April 23, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML. Emphasis in original.

⁴³ “DeptState PR-212,” April 24, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Eisenhower's presidential rival Adlai Stevenson said the same thing. Yet in campaign speeches Eisenhower maintained that the Soviet change in tactics as a result of destalinisation did not mean there was any change in Soviet aims.⁴⁵ But casting doubt on the Soviet changes was a strange way to pursue the stated goal of promoting evolutionary change in the USSR. Soviets objectives were probably unchanged, insofar as they remained communist. But Soviet means certainly had, and the administration failed to see the importance of this. In American Cold War discourse, statements that asserted the unchanging nature of Soviet goals only obscured the much more important issue of the change in means.

The Initial Response to the 20th Party Congress and Secret Speech

Knowledge of Khrushchev's speech gave new urgency to ascertaining the direction of destalinisation, and the State Department and White House took steps to investigate. Over the coming months the OCB set up, and then consolidated, a number of groups that scrutinised destalinisation. The roots of these groups actually stretched back to 1953. Under the aegis of the OCB's predecessor the PSB, a Working Group on Stalin was convened in the wake of Stalin's death to find ways of exploiting the event.⁴⁶ Following the condemnation of Stalin, the OCB embarked on almost exactly the same path. Many of the records of the group are missing and the ones that do exist either remain classified or are heavily redacted.⁴⁷ What is known is that after the 20th Party Congress the OCB Special Working Group on Stalinism (SWGS), led by Jacob Beam, Robert Murphy and Park Armstrong met almost daily to produce reports on the anti-Stalin campaign and finding ways to exploit it. The OCB agreed that the group should provide guidance to the State Department and USIA.⁴⁸ The recommendations of the group

⁴⁵ "Monthly Survey of American Opinion No.180," May 2, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 12, Monthly Survey 1956, NARA.

⁴⁶ "Staff Support for NSC Action 734d(3)," March 19, 1953, RG59, ExSec, PSB Working File, 1951-53, Box 6, PSB D-40, NARA.

⁴⁷ *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1990), 170-171, footnotes 1, 4, 5. All existing documentation relating to the OCB groups, along with the notes of withdrawn files, can be found in: NARA, RG59, Bureau of Euro Affairs, Office files of Asst SecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, folders: 'Stalin Committee', 'Stalin I', 'Stalin II'.

⁴⁸ Confusingly, the group dealing with destalinisation was inconsistently referred to as "the Ad Hoc Committee on Stalinism", "Special Working Group on Stalinism", and the "Ad Hoc Committee on the anti-Stalin Campaign". From late April onwards, the references to the Ad Hoc Committees are replaced with documents referring to the "Special Working Group on Stalinism". For the sake of clarity I refer to all groups under the OCB as the "Special Working Group on Stalinism" (SWGS). "OCB Minutes," April 4, 1956, RG59, ExSec, ACF 1953-61, Box 2, (untitled), NARA; "Letter:

were much the same as those that had been mooted in the State Department before. The SWGS suggested that official criticism of Stalin be redirected towards economic issues. In terms of politics, the OCB sought to show that one-party rule directly caused one-man rule. In both these themes the SWGS felt that there should be official and non-official policies. Officially, the U.S. should remain sceptical of destalinisation, but be careful not to appear jubilant lest this cause communists to close ranks. Unofficially, the U.S. should try and sow confusion among communists, and even ridicule of the Soviet leaders. Foreign sources should be utilised in order to appear objective. The OCB coordinated such campaigns with the British and French, with the latter publishing satirical posters to this effect.⁴⁹

The suggestions of the SWGS were much the same that the State Department and USIA had been following for the past months. The fact that it was meeting daily to discuss destalinisation suggested that it was the source of the line that had been followed thus far. Though Dulles was contemptuous of bodies like the OCB, figures he respected like Armstrong and Beam, which meant he was likely to take the guidance seriously. Indeed, at the end of May the SWGS proposed to widen its focus to consider developments in the Satellites and Soviet Union more generally. This was formalised by the end of June when the group was reformed into the Special Committee on Soviet and Related Problems. If the group had been useless or a bureaucratic graveyard, it was unlikely given Dulles' feelings about 'coordination' that he would have allowed the creation of the new committee.⁵⁰

Richards to Beam," April 4, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 14, Anti-Stalin Campaign, NARA; "Memo: Beam to UnderSecState," March 28, 1956; Memo: Beam to Murphy *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24, 85-87*; "Report of the OCB Ad Hoc Committee on the Anti-Stalin Campaign," April 21, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState for European Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin Committee, NARA. More than half the report is redacted. ; "OCB Minutes," May 7, 1956, RoP, WHCF, CF, 1953-61, Box 63, Russia (13), DDEL; "OCB Minutes," May 14, 1956, RoP, WHCF, CF, 1953-61, Box 63, Russia (13), DDEL. "Memo: Beam to UnderSecState," March 28, 1956; Memo from Beam to Murphy, April 3, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24, 85-87*; "Report of the OCB Ad Hoc Committee on the Anti-Stalin Campaign" More than half the report is redacted. "OCB Minutes," May 7, 1956; "OCB Minutes," May 14, 1956.

⁴⁹ "OCB Report of SWGS," May 17, 1956, RG59, ExSec, SSF 1953-61, Box 43, Soviet and Related Problems (Stalinism), NARA.

⁵⁰ *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25, 171*, footnote 5; "OCB Minutes," May 23, 1956, RG59, ExSec, ACF 1953-61, Box 2, (untitled), NARA.

Stalin the "Super-Judas"

Other ways of exploiting the situation were far less cerebral. One such instance was 'Orlov affair'. Formerly an NKVD General, Alexander Orlov accused Stalin of being an Okhrana agent from 1906-12, as well as being homosexual, and argued that *this* was the true basis of destalinisation. In April 1956 *LIFE* published Orlov's accusations along with documents purporting to prove Stalin's guilt. Orlov claimed to first learn of Stalin's work for the Okhrana in 1937 from documents in the Ukrainian NKVD archive. These were shared with Politburo members who were subsequently killed. Zhukov learned of the file and the murders and shared the information with the current leaders, thus forcing the destalinisation campaign.⁵¹ All of this was outlandish, and any credibility was further eroded since émigré groups were responsible for spreading the story. The Tolstoy Foundation was foremost in this and received CIA funding. But some scholars took it seriously. Russian historian Isaac Don Levine wrote to Bulganin demanding the release of the complete file in order to expose the full truth of Stalin the "super-Judas".⁵² Levine contacted Kennan to review the documents, but probably did not expect Kennan to reply that he *had seen* the documents when he was still in State Department. Kennan explained that he did not have the time to give the documents the type of research they needed in order to determine their authenticity, though he thought they were genuine. He recommended they not be released while Stalin was alive, and if they were, only by a private organisation or scholar and with context provided by respected historians.⁵³ Kennan's hypothesis that Khrushchev and others murdered Stalin would have meshed with Orlov's accusations and would have provided the Soviet leaders with an excellent reason for embarking on destalinisation in order to pre-empt the revelation that they killed Stalin. But if anything, Kennan's explanation seems even more far-fetched than the accusations themselves. It is hard to believe that Kennan could not have found the manpower to evaluate the documents when he was in government

⁵¹ "Tolstoy Foundation Press Release: Stalin Shown as Czarist Spy," April 18, 1956, HSP Box 171, Folder 17, CUL; "Life Press Release: Stalin Revealed as Czarist Spy," April 18, 1956, HSP Box 171, Folder 17, CUL; Bruce Munn, "Salisbury Cable Re Orlov Interview," April 18, 1956, HSP Box 171, Folder 17, CUL.

⁵² Isaac Levine to Nikolai Bulganin, n.d., HSP Box 171, Folder 17, CUL.

⁵³ George F Kennan to Isaac Levine, May 22, 1956, HSP Box 171, Folder 17, CUL.

service given the potential gravity of the accusations and the propaganda coup it would have handed the U.S.

CENIS

No one in the Eisenhower administration took these accusations seriously, if for no other reason than there were more important, obvious, and verifiable changes taking place as a result of the 20th Party Congress. Both the OCB and the SWGS sought outside analysis of the Congress, and turned to the Center for International Studies at MIT (CENIS).⁵⁴ It felt that the ideological changes of the Congress were of primary importance. CENIS asserted that ideology did not in itself determine Soviet policy, or even relations between Moscow and foreign communist parties. Rather, the role of ideology was more subtle, but no less important, and played a key role in the changes underway. Ideology was both the vocabulary of the Soviet leaders- the way power struggles between them were articulated- and the means of communication between the Kremlin and the people. It was the manner in which Soviet intentions and desires were presented and provided legitimacy for the leaders.⁵⁵ This interpretation was not far from Bohlen's view of the USSR. It was, however, in stark contrast to Dulles who felt that ideology not only was the motivation for Soviet actions, but was also a useful way of predicting Soviet moves.

CENIS also found reason to doubt destalinisation:

...while the recent changes may in the long-run may be favorable to our interests, they do not now represent a change in Moscow's fundamentally hostile objectives, but are, in fact, designed to increase the effectiveness of Moscow's hostile policies...⁵⁶

According to the CENIS, the importance for U.S. policymaking lay in the way that the modified Soviet Communist ideology would change how the Kremlin behaved. The ideological modifications all came in the wake of practical modifications made since 1953. These changes, along with the re-emphasis on

⁵⁴ Both Rostow and CENIS had a history of close collaboration with the government in both the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations. An account specific to CENIS is: Allan A. Needell, "'Truth Is Our Weapon': Project TROY, Political Warfare, and Government-Academic Relations in the National Security State," *Diplomatic History* 17, no. 3 (1993); The most comprehensive history of government-academic collaboration in this regard is: Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*.

⁵⁵ "CENIS Paper: A Note on the Recent Ideological Changes in Moscow," April 18, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 14, Anti-Stalin Campaign, NARA.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Lenin brought the USSR closer to the values of the non-communist world. The Congress not only made these changes into doctrine, but it also:

Clean[ed] out Stalin who had become associated in a highly personal way with all least attractive (*sic*) about Communism, they aim to facilitate the present policy of economic and political subversion of the Free World.⁵⁷

CENIS clearly envisioned destalinisation as a manner of opening up opportunities for the Soviets, but not necessarily of a change in objectives since the Soviets were still out to subvert the West. Indeed, CENIS noted, "Stalin's elimination is a tactical move without solid foundations. The present leaders are not prepared to abandon these ideas and practices."⁵⁸

But by discarding Stalinism, the Soviets left an ideological void. CENIS argued it would be nearly impossible for the Soviets to provide an monolithic alternative to Stalinism in any detail without opening themselves up to attack from both the West and other communists. Ironically, the very dismissal of Stalinism made this at once a certainty: it prevented the Soviets from doing anything about it, except for trying to define the new ideology further, which again they could not do lest they invite criticism. CENIS astutely pointed out the dilemma the Soviets faced: destroying Stalinism increased the appeal of Soviet Communism abroad and promoted initiative at home. But it also exposed Soviet ideology to deviation, especially now that national roads to socialism were allowed. CENIS predicted that the Soviets would allow a certain amount of growth in "permissible doctrine", but would also establish a firm line past which criticism and deviation could not pass.

This presented both opportunities and dangers to the U.S. CENIS indicated that the U.S. could influence thinking in the USSR by introducing the right sort of questions about the changes. CENIS noted "[p]luralistic thinking in the Communist world is bound to grow. If it is properly exploited by Free World performance and thought, it could hasten the liquidation of Communism itself." CENIS suggested that the U.S. demonstrate that destalinisation was only just beginning. This should create enough doubt among foreign Communist parties to prevent any sort of useful planning or incorporation of the ideological changes. In addition, the U.S. should continue to publicly identify Khrushchev and the other

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

leaders with Stalinism. But the perverse logic of destalinisation so far meant that each opportunity for the Soviets presented one to the West. Thus, pluralism was also strength to the Kremlin, since the very image of Communism as pluralist may have made the Soviet model more attractive to other leftists.⁵⁹

Between the Devil and the Deep Red Sea

Dulles was aware that destalinisation represented a Rubicon for the Soviet leaders. However the Kremlin played the situation, Stalin's crimes had been revealed, and this had potential danger and advantages for both the USSR and the U.S. Just as CENIS argued, the State Department's Executive Secretariat discussed the prospect that destalinisation could increase the appeal and respectability of the Soviet system. The U.S. could counter this by trumpeting the very tyranny described by Khrushchev and illustrating that this admission of Stalin's crimes destroyed the claims of infallibility upon which communism relied. The propaganda line developed at the very beginning of the destalinisation campaign was continued, and the State Department again forwarded the idea that discrediting Stalin did not destroy Stalinism: a continued police state, collectivisation, and the domination of Eastern Europe all proved this. By disseminating this line the U.S. could promote disarray among communists, but also avoid the appearance of a propaganda offensive by tailoring the message to each region or group. Thus the revelations of destalinisation were hoped would promote evolutionary change in the USSR, encourage feelings of nationalism and Titoism in the satellites, and discourage the tendency to treat the Soviets with respect in the free world. Yet the Executive Secretariat claimed it did not "rigidly reject all possibility of change in the Soviet system". The self-criticism that destalinisation represented was an important step, but only a preliminary one.⁶⁰ Indeed, the administration thought evolutionary change was the best chance for

⁵⁹ Ibid.; Though the paper CENIS prepared with this information was credited as the "collective thoughts of those at CENIS" it bore signs of Walt Rostow's heavy influence, especially in the suggestions of ways the U.S. could capitalise on the ideological changes of the Congress, which were almost verbatim to the ones he made to William Jackson and Allen Dulles. Clearly Rostow thought his suggestions would gain more traction if they were presented as the conclusions of an academic group, and not his alone. Rostow to William Jackson, March 29, 1956, CDJP, 1931-67, Box 91, Rostow, Walt W., 1956, DDEL; "Memo: Rostow to AD"; "Rostow Washington Star Article," February 27, 1956, CDJP, 1931-67, Box 91, Rostow, Walt W., 1956, DDEL.

⁶⁰ "The Anti-Stalin Campaign in the USSR," n.d., RG59, ExSec, SSF 1953-61, Box 43, Soviet and Related Problems (Stalinism), NARA.

reforming the USSR.⁶¹ After picking apart destalinisation in public information campaigns such a statement was somewhat hypocritical. But its presence showed that some in the administration thought that destalinisation could not be written off.

Those inside the USSR realised that destalinisation was indeed a very serious undertaking. It appeared to be the only way, other than war or revolution, that the Soviet leaders could relieve some of the pressure that had built up. But it was extremely risky. Salisbury noted that every time there had been a move towards relaxation, some sort of political violence had flared up in the Soviet bloc: in the GDR and Pilsen in 1953, and most recently in Poznan and Tiflis. But Khrushchev needed to eliminate Stalinism, since it repressed innovation and reduced incentives. Salisbury thought the motives were economic as well as political. He made the distinction between Stalin and Stalinism when addressing the issue and credited Khrushchev with attempting to eliminate the latter.⁶² This was notable given that many in the Eisenhower administration and press insisted that the hallmarks of Stalinism remained. The inability of many in the government to draw a distinction between the Soviet system and Stalinism was a key issue. The destalinisation campaign was removing many aspects of Stalinism, not to mention symbols of the man himself. Yet most in the Eisenhower administration continued to note that attributes of the Soviet system such as collectivised agriculture, secret police, and support for communist regimes in Eastern Europe as proof that 'Stalinism' still existed. What is more, they did so even while tracing the existence of these things to Leninism in an attempt to discredit the revival of Lenin in Soviet propaganda. They failed to see the existence of these attributes before Stalin's reign. Instead they took a 'pick and mix' approach to the changes in the USSR that allowed them to take note of the changes that conformed to or confirmed their perceptions of the Soviet leaders and disregarded the rest as tactical.

Dulles knew of the strain that destalinisation was placing on relations between the Kremlin and foreign communist parties.⁶³ But he made no distinction

⁶¹ Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 87-119 Hixson addresses this in regards to the switch from psychological warfare to cultural diplomacy.

⁶² "Despatch: 'Sunday for Desmond', H. Salisbury," June 1956, HSP, Box 173, Folder 5, CUL.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

between Stalinism and the Soviet system. He did not realise that if it were a case of merely sacrificing the image of Stalin in order to maintain the Soviet system, there would not have been the same level of agony within the communist movement about destalinisation. This is not to say that destalinisation would have been easy, but rather to illustrate that Dulles, and many under him, did not have a clear idea of what Stalinism, as opposed to the Soviet system more broadly, represented. Dulles failed to grasp that the most of the economic and political reforms that could be credited with dismantling Stalinism had been enacted before the 20th Party Congress in the 1953-55 period. As shown, these were mostly disregarded by the administration. Had they come at the same time as the Congress, the administration may have put more credence in them. But the irony again was that although numerous intelligence reports and analyses noted that the ideological changes of the Congress rubber stamped the changes made in the years since Stalin's death, Dulles and Eisenhower failed to connect the dots and continued to view the practical changes of destalinisation (since 1953) as piecemeal rather than as a whole, and the shock of destalinisation (since the 20th Party Congress) as largely rhetorical since they thought the hallmarks of Stalinism remained in place.

The trend toward greater liberalisation in the USSR did not escape the notice of the media in the U.S. and Dulles was forced to address the issue. He coyly acknowledged the unknown nature of the Soviet changes; time was needed to tell what the Soviet motives truly were. Such a statement meant served two purposes: it was both a hedge against any future changes by the Soviets that could be to the detriment of U.S. interests and a way for him to indirectly address the uncertainties of his own perceptions that had recently developed. He thought that the liberalisation that had occurred in the USSR, both since Stalin's death and since the 20th Party Congress, represented a 'barometer' that was recording a latent desire for greater personal freedoms and a more representative government. Dulles was projecting the American experience of resistance to tyranny onto the Soviet people. But he saw that the Soviet leaders may simply be 'playing' to these feelings by offering something that seemed to satisfy some of these demands, but was really the status quo. Nothing happened that promised a

better future for Soviet citizens. But he acknowledged that liberalising forces must be strong for the Soviet leaders to embark on destalinisation.⁶⁴

Dulles would not have to wait long for more signs of liberalisation. In May the Soviet leaders announced a massive reduction in the size of its standing military forces. Although Dulles and the State Department based much of their scepticism of destalinisation on the fact that the ideological changes and renouncement of Stalin were not 'concrete' acts, the reduction of almost 1.2 million men was also discounted. To Dulles these were not irreversible gestures. The men could be easily recalled and re-equipped since there was no commensurate reduction in armaments. The Soviets could afford to make this change due to the increase in their nuclear forces. And betraying his belief in a communist world more united than it actually was he indicated that the Chinese retained huge military manpower. There were no peaceful intentions behind the reduction, instead Dulles pointed to a need for industrial and agricultural manpower. The men who were demobilised could now be at work in factories producing military goods.⁶⁵ Opinion in the press was similar. The common line was that the Soviets were simply making better nuclear weapons, and thus its large army was obsolete.⁶⁶ Much of the country seemed to be sufficiently convinced of Soviet nuclear weaponry to offset any other reduction in the military. As a result, the reduction in manpower was interpreted as a propaganda ploy aimed at neutralists and Western European leftists. Aware of the public relations value of such a move, Dulles stressed to the press that since 1945 the U.S. had reduced the size of its military from 12 million to 3 million, whereas the Soviet military after the current reductions numbered over 4 million men.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the reduction was substantial- particularly since so much of it had taken place since Stalin's death, as the unilateral reduction of over 600,000 men

⁶⁴ "DeptState PR-255," May 15, 1956, 255, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML.

⁶⁵ "DeptState PR-254," May 15, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML; "DeptState PR-255"; For the Soviet angle of the troop reductions see: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, Chapters 13-14; Evangelista argues that Khrushchev would have been successful in reforming the military if the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations had not dismissed the reductions. Matthew Evangelista, "'Why Keep Such an Army?' Khrushchev's Troop Reductions," *CWIHP Working Paper Series*, no. 19 (December 1997).

⁶⁶ "Daily Opinion Summary," May 16, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2694-2820, Jan-June 1956, 1, NARA.

⁶⁷ "DeptState PR-254."

that that preceded it in 1955 illustrated. There was clearly no longer an emphasis on 'bigger is better', as Stalin had preached.

Chapter Conclusion

The administration voraciously collected all manner of intelligence on the nascent destalinisation campaign. Conclusions were quickly reached that Stalin's image was being destroyed to consolidate the rule of the collective leadership and the power of the Party. Disavowing Stalin's legacy was seen as a significant threat to the U.S. Events in the USSR were again evaluated in light of the worst-case scenario they could present to the U.S. Of course, it would be irresponsible if the administration did not consider these scenarios. But the focus on the 'worst case' made many in the administration disregard the very real changes in the Kremlin that were the result of destalinisation. To be sure, destalinisation was intended in part as a way of burnishing the image of Soviet Communism for export abroad, especially in the Third World. But the focus on such uses blurred the fact that the USSR was beginning to liberalise and proceed in a direction that was favourable to improved relations. Many in the State Department, the press, and academia continued to insist that destalinisation was meant as yet another ruse to undermine the West. To an extent, many of those who resisted the apparent changes: the editors of *Time*, Walt Rostow, and the OIR, did so because the concept of an unalterably aggressive and subversive USSR was necessary for the worldview they clung to. The image of the U.S. as defending liberty, religious freedom, and the free market- was developed in opposition to 'monolithic communism'. The USSR sat at the apex of this conception. Destalinisation was incompatible with this.

But crucially, Eisenhower and Dulles had come around to accept that the changes in the USSR since 1953 *were* more than window dressing. Since 1953 both Eisenhower and Dulles were rigid and doctrinaire towards any changes in the USSR. But the 20th Party Congress represented a tipping point in U.S. perceptions of the Soviet leaders and Soviet Communism more generally. They expressed of belief in the veracity of destalinisation. Such talk would become more common over the next months, even if it remained for the time being, in private.

Chapter 7: Changing Perceptions

By the summer of 1956 there was increasing acceptance that Soviet Communism was changing and that this could no longer be ignored. This chapter charts the course of changing perceptions of Soviet Communism by examining how certain policymakers in the administration reacted to the obtainment of the Secret Speech. A lively debate ensued over whether the denunciation of Stalin amounted to a change in Soviet Communism, or whether it was once again a tactical manoeuvre. A concurrent argument raged over how the U.S. should exploit the anti-Stalin campaign to its benefit. By the end of the summer Eisenhower and Dulles no longer adhered to an image of the Soviets as rigid, doctrinaire Stalinists: they recognised the changing nature of Soviet Communism but maintained that it posed a danger nonetheless.

The Speech Reaches the West

The U.S. had been attempting to get a copy of Khrushchev's speech since the 20th Party Congress, but it was not until 18 May that a copy was obtained. Only a few knew of its existence while it was studied for authenticity.¹ Hoover thought the U.S. should leak it to the press, since other versions were apparently less effective as propaganda than the one the U.S. obtained. He asked Bohlen for guidance.² Bohlen was in two minds about the wisdom of releasing the speech. The speech offered some clarity about current Soviet policies and could be useful to students of Soviet affairs. However, it could convince those less informed that Khrushchev and others were liberals. If the U.S. was purely after the propaganda value, then releasing it could hurt as much as it helped. If the purpose was to provide insights into Soviet policy, then Bohlen advocated releasing it through a non-governmental body such as the Committee for a Free Europe.³ Word had gotten out that the State Department had a copy of the speech and the press was

¹ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 284; "Memo: Armstrong to SecState, with Preliminary Copy of Secret Speech," May 18, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 15, Khrushchev 2/25/56 Speech, NARA The CIA had acquired a copy from Israeli intelligence, who had in turn gotten it from a Polish source.

² Cable: DeptState to the Embassy in the Soviet Union, May 31, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 107-108.

³ Cable: Bohlen to StateDept, June 2, 1956, *ibid.*, 111-113.

clamouring for its release.⁴ This more than anything else forced the decision to release it. The leak was almost certainly the work of those in the State Department who wanted the text released.

The source may have been the same that spoke to *Time* journalists detailing the divisions in the administration over whether to release the speech. One group in the administration thought that releasing the speech would highlight that there had been fundamental change in the Kremlin. This group thought that the Soviet leaders had adopted a different “communist technique”. They resisted making the speech public since the new, less aggressive methods of the Kremlin appealed to neutralists. Releasing the speech could strengthen the belief of those like Nehru and Tito who believed that a fundamental change had taken place. It was a risk for the U.S. to promote any sort of “superficial interpretation” of this sort.

A second group in the administration advocated releasing the speech on the grounds that it painted such a horrid picture of communism that it could only help the West’s cause by highlighting Stalin’s crimes and demoralising communists- especially in the satellites. It was particularly damaging since it presented communists as either “knaves” if they were part of Stalin’s crimes; or “fools” if they claimed not to have known of them.⁵ The CIA was the scene of a similar argument. Jim Angleton, head of the CIA Special Operations Division, and who along with Frank Wisner was involved in obtaining the copy, opposed releasing the speech.⁶

Allen Dulles overruled Angleton. He then called his brother early on 4 June to press for its release. Furthering the sense of urgency were reports that the French also had a copy of the speech. It was thought better to release it in full and have control over how it was done, than risk the speech being released in a manner the U.S. could not control. Ultimately the decision came down to Eisenhower, who was advised to do so by both Allen and Foster Dulles.

⁴ Circular Telegram From Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions, June 2, 1956, *ibid.*, 109-110.

⁵ “‘Khrushchev’, Beal to Williamson,” June 8, 1956, TCD, Box 2, Folder 37, HL.

⁶ “Ray Cline on Destalinization,” September 29, 1978, HSP Box 172, Folder 16, CUL.

Eisenhower agreed, and with footnotes prepared by the CIA, it was published in the *New York Times* that day.⁷

Exploiting the Speech

The U.S. quickly embarked on a campaign of saturating the Soviet Bloc and neutral nations with the speech: VOA broadcast it in 43 languages.⁸ The broadcasts were limited in their scope, as was USIA output, which was restricted to repeating press reports of the speech due to a State Department Office of Public Affairs ban on commentary. USIA Director Theodore Streibert knew of Dulles' repeated public statements over the past months that Stalin was a product of the Soviet system that remained in place. Streibert wanted permission to produce USIA commentary along these lines.⁹ The limitations on content were partially an indication of Dulles' cautious nature. An overenthusiastic American response could cause communists to unite in the face of propaganda attacks. Bohlen, Salisbury and even USIA deputy Director Washburn argued this to varying degrees. But Dulles' reticence to allow more cutting U.S. propaganda also reflected his own personal conflict over the nature of destalinisation.

The CIA was also keen on developing propaganda from the speech. All of it, however, focussed on highlighting the continuity between Stalin and the current leadership, and why there was nothing preventing another dictator.¹⁰ In addition, Ray Cline, who was in charge of Sino-Soviet affairs at the CIA sent Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs Livingston Merchant copies of several critiques of the Soviet system in order to prepare methods of exploiting the speech. Among these were essays on "Dictatorship Versus Democracy" and the "Return to Leninism". These sought to illustrate that dictatorship was inherent to Leninism, that Stalin was heir to Lenin's ideas, and reasserted the Soviet goal of destroying capitalism. Another essay, "Khrushchev vs.

⁷ Circular Telegram From the Department of State to Certain Diplomatic Missions, June 2, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 109-110; "DeptState PR (unnumbered)," June 4, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML; "'Khrushchev', Beal to Williamson."

⁸ Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 284; "'Khrushchev', Beal to Williamson."

⁹ "Memcon: USIA Re Khrushchev Speech," June 7, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, Box 3506, 761.00/3-2155, NARA; "Memo: Beam to UnderSecState," June 27, 1956, G59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 29, OCB Committee on Soviet Problems III, NARA.

¹⁰ "Topics for Research on Problems Resulting from the 20th CPSU," March 1956, CREST, CIA-RDP78-02771R000200150004-7, NARA.

Khrushchev", dug up various contradictory Khrushchev quotations.¹¹ Yet despite this focus on propaganda, the CIA did ask what destalinisation meant for Soviet domestic and foreign policies and how effective liberalisation measures had been, both in the USSR and in the satellites.¹² This indicated an appreciation of destalinisation as more than a tactical manoeuvre to be discredited. Propaganda was only one response while the CIA determined how destalinisation would pan out.

Despite the enthusiasm of those under him in the State Department and in the CIA, by the end of June Foster Dulles remained hesitant to allow the propagandists in the administration free reign. He recognised that the Secret Speech gave the U.S. a once in a lifetime propaganda opportunity that could "...fragmentize the wall of granite of the International Communist Party". His ideas for doing were based on letting the speech speak for itself: distribution of the speech was the primary vehicle for exploitation. Indeed, though Dulles' staff and undersecretaries all agreed that the speech offered excellent material for the USIA, they could only agree that the State Department, CIA and USIA should coordinate on the matter, while SWGS researched lines of exploitation.¹³ The State Department was responsible for tying its own hands due to the blanket ban on original comment on the speech. The reasoning was that the "speech affair" was unfolding in a direction beneficial to the U.S. without any interference, and further comment only risked derailing this. Yet some like Beam came to agree with Streibert that the time had come to go beyond a passive strategy and draw attention to certain aspects of the speech that the press had not addressed. Among these were the conditions that could be further improved in the Soviet system and Stalin's misdeeds not specifically mentioned in Khrushchev's speech.¹⁴

Thus, almost a month after the U.S. obtained a copy of the speech the only agreement in the administration was for further study to be done. This corroborated Dulles' diatribe against 'over-coordination' inside the State Department. But it also highlighted the lack of forward planning. The

¹¹ "CIA Documents Sent by Ray Cline," June 12, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 30, Stalin II, NARA.

¹² *Ibid.*; "Topics for Research on Problems Resulting from the 20th CPSU."

¹³ "Richards to Beam," June 25, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA; Notes of the Secretary of State's Staff Meeting, June 25, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 117-118.

¹⁴ "Memo: Beam to UnderSecState," June 27, 1956.

administration knew that it would get a copy of the speech eventually, but failed to make any plans on what to do when they did. Thus for all Eisenhower's claimed infatuation with organisation that he garnered through his career as a staff officer, he failed to direct the organisation he created at a time of incredible opportunity for the administration, both in terms of improving relations with the Soviets, or, alternatively, for exploiting destalinisation. Yet there is another, complementary, possibility: Dulles recognised that destalinisation was progressing in a direction favourable to the U.S. It could lead the Soviets towards the liberalisation he predicted, and thus he restrained efforts to exploit the speech for propaganda effect.

The Analysis of the Speech

After the speech was released, Dulles' public statements reflected his divided thoughts over destalinisation. He repeatedly stressed that Stalinism was the result of the Soviet system, and the system remained in tact. The West must, therefore, be on guard against the emergence of another Stalin figure.¹⁵ Yet even these public statements were now two-sided. He expressed that destalinisation could result in liberalisation. This reflected the variations in his thinking. To be sure, in previous years Dulles admitted the possibility of change in the Soviet system, but in reality he was only leaving the rhetorical door open - he saw no chance of it and consistently acted to block any policies that could weaken, or even be seen to weaken, the U.S. cold war position. But after the 20th Party Congress Dulles persisted in mentioning the possibility of liberalisation in the USSR. Of course he was hardly sanguine about it. He repeated the State Department line that violence was inherent in Leninism, that the current leaders were Stalin's accomplices, and that the Soviets could quickly revert to Stalinist tactics. As for Soviet objectives, he pointed out the obvious fact that the Soviets remained communists. The speech was only a way of improving their image.¹⁶ For these reasons the U.S. could ill afford to let up on its defence. Yet in almost every statement or speech he gave in June 1956 he presented the dichotomy of liberalisation in the USSR, and the need for the West to be cautious, but open to it,

¹⁵ "DeptState PR-312," June 12, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML; "DeptState PR-314," June 12, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML.

¹⁶ "DeptState PR-345," June 20, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML; Hixson, *Parting the Curtain*, 107.

along with the need for the West to maintain vigilance lest destalinisation fail to pan out.¹⁷ For example:

[The] fact that the Soviet rulers now denounce much of the past gives cause for hope, because it demonstrates that the liberalizing influences from within and without can bring about peaceful change...[The] yearnings of the subject peoples are not to be satisfied merely by a rewriting of past history. *Thus we can hope for ultimate changes more fundamental than any that have so far been revealed.*¹⁸

The allowance for Soviet liberalisation did not remove the need for the Western alliance and he worried constantly about Western unity. He remained concerned that the Soviet 'new look' was concocted to divide the West. His emphasis on European unity did little to help the opinions of him in Western Europe, especially among the Belgians and French. After years of Dulles' refrains that nothing was changing in the USSR and that the West needed to maintain its defence many viewed Dulles as a impractical moralist who regarded the Soviets as "devils with whom any traffic is the acme of unholiness".¹⁹ The irony of Dulles' doubt of Soviet changes was to increase divisions between the U.S. and many Europeans, the very thing he was trying to prevent.

However, Dulles knew that it was Adenauer's opinion that mattered more than those of the French and Belgians. This explained, from a foreign policy standpoint, his hedging over the promise of destalinisation. The FRG was a key ally, and Dulles was keen not to alarm Adenauer. Adenauer was adamant that destalinisation was simply a tactic and the objectives of the Soviets remained "world communism". Peaceful coexistence was a "passing interim stage". According to Adenauer, the Russians had been expansionist for centuries, and destalinisation was not about to change that. Destalinisation was part of a larger Soviet soft line that was successful in appealing to neutralists across the globe. It was also dividing Europe and the U.S. This was especially dangerous for Germany, and Adenauer claimed destalinisation was also part of a larger plan to prevent reunification.

¹⁷ In addition to the press releases *ibid*, see also: "JFD News Conference," June 21, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML.

¹⁸ Dulles quoted from: Kovrig, *The Myth of Liberation*, 165. Emphasis added.

¹⁹ In contrast, Eisenhower was viewed as man who realised that "the devil" would be around for a long time, and though he disliked him, it was best to learn how to live with "the devil" until he could be vanquished. "'Foreign Policy II', Lambert to Williamson," June 22, 1956, TCD, Box 3, Folder 39, HL.

Time correspondents echoed Adenauer. They were critical of those who interpreted the speech to mean there were changes afoot in the USSR. But the editorial line had shifted: the mistake now was not insisting that there was change, but it was in assuming it was good. *Time* admitted to a change in strategy, but the overall objectives of the Kremlin remained the same as under Stalin. The Soviets were still intent to “swallow more and more of the world by one means or another.”²⁰

Naturally the interpretation among *Time* correspondents was among the most conservative of Kremlin watchers. It was Bohlen, on the ground in Moscow, who offered a more grounded take on the 20th Party Congress and destalinisation. Whereas Dulles struggled to reconcile his long held perceptions of the Soviets with the developments of the Secret Speech and destalinisation, Bohlen had no such hindrances. He had insisted since 1953 that there was serious change afoot in the Kremlin, and therefore the Secret Speech was not the shock to him it was to many other U.S. policymakers.²¹ His perspective in Moscow and vast Soviet experience made him reach different conclusions to those in Washington. The idea that destalinisation was a last minute decision was commonly heard among the State Department and White House. Indeed, Sovietologists provided a litany of reasons for the Secret Speech. These varied from repetitions of the idea that the current leaders killed Stalin in order to prevent a Third World War, to suggestions that Mikoyan’s earlier speech to the Congress- which was very critical of Stalin- that pushed Khrushchev into giving a harsher speech than he originally planned.²²

Bohlen vehemently disagreed with these hypotheses. It was unlikely that the Soviet leadership would embark on such a dangerous course without greater planning. Indeed, Bohlen noted a meeting of Soviet historians in January that had agreed on the same revisions as the 20th Party Congress, though without naming

²⁰ “‘Khrushchev’, Beal to Williamson.”

²¹ Yelisaveta, “De-Stalinisation in the Mirror of Western Politics,” 116–117. Yelisaveta’s article is unique in its perspective of examining destalinisation with Western politics in mind. The article gets a number of things correct, for example, that some in the State Department thought the purpose of destalinisation was Soviet domestic politics. However, most of the conclusions she draws are banal. She notes Dulles’ initial resistance to destalinisation in his public statements, but does not note the difference between these and his prior statements on changes in the USSR. Thus she misses the reduced hostility and cautious optimism he expressed. This is somewhat surprising as the article was written in the period when Dulles and Eisenhower revisionism was in vogue.

²² Albert Parry, “The Twentieth Congress: Stalin’s ‘Second Funeral,’” *American Slavic and East European Review* 15, no. 4 (December 1956): 464–466.

Stalin directly. The meeting involved over 600 historians from across the USSR, making it unlikely that it could have been arranged on short notice, especially for such a sensitive topic. Both of the main speakers at the conference also referred to prior Party instructions as the reasons for the revisions announced.²³

In Bohlen's mind the Secret Speech, and destalinisation more generally, were the logical consequences of developments since Stalin's death. The new policies introduced since 1953 required at least implied criticism of Stalin. The new leaders could hardly embark on different policies without at some point addressing the underlying ideology that had formed the basis of Soviet politics for over 20 years. To Bohlen, it was necessary to challenge Stalin since the policies that had developed under him were based on dictatorial rule. If collective leadership were to work, then such a "frontal attack" was practically a necessity. This was not to say that there were not differences of opinion inside the Presidium on how to proceed. Nevertheless, Bohlen totally rejected the idea that destalinisation was somehow a last minute decision prior to the 20th Party Congress.²⁴

Bohlen's depth of knowledge about the USSR allowed him to provide perspective on the events of the 20th Party Congress. He ordered the embassy to compile a series of despatches covering the extent of destalinisation thus far in science, philosophy and law. But most crucially the embassy found that Stalin's figure in Soviet history would heavily revised, but not eliminated entirely since a number of key policies developed under him remained in force. It was likely that Stalin would be reduced to the level of a pupil of Lenin. But the embassy also predicted that Soviet history more generally would be re-written. Stalin's 'Short Course' on the history of the CPSU, his biography, and his history of the Great Patriotic War would all need to be withdrawn or heavily revised. This would lead to a rise in the importance of Lenin for Soviet history.²⁵ This was part of the re-emphasis on Lenin that Bohlen had noted in domestic Soviet life, and Rostow feared as part of a larger global campaign to burnish the Soviet 'brand'.

²³ "Despatch: Bohlen to DeptState, No.546," June 18, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ "Memo: Shaw to Various, Attached to Moscow No.546," June 18, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

Within a month of his statements about communism being a “wall of granite”²⁶, Dulles told the press that as a result of the Secret Speech international communism was “in a state of perplexity and internal odds.” For Dulles, the Secret Speech did not correctly address the source of communism’s ills. He reiterated that Stalin was merely a symptom of the greater problem: communism itself. Nevertheless, the Secret Speech led Dulles to acknowledge that the Soviets inadvertently distanced themselves from international communism. He did not think that the dissolution of the Comintern or recent end of the Cominform was what led to the practical difference between Moscow and abroad. Rather, the Secret Speech had shaken their ability to control foreign communist parties. Destalinisation meant that the Kremlin was no longer reliant on “terrorism” to influence parties abroad.²⁷ What was once thought a monolithic communist menace was now a fragmented movement. This brought his thinking more in line with his brother, who had made similar comments in March²⁸, and underscored how far his own thoughts had come since April. He was now publicly admitting that his previous perceptions of the Soviets were misplaced.

But the apparent disunity of international communism did not preclude suspicions of a greater Soviet plan. Speaking to the NSC Allen Dulles ruminated “[W]hat are the Soviets actually driving at?” Both Nixon and Harold Stassen believed that the ‘confusion’ of the Soviets was merely a Kremlin plot. Allen Dulles would not go this far- he thought there was genuine confusion- but that there was a greater meaning to it than was presently apparent. Further illustrating how far his thinking had evolved, Foster Dulles now seemed to be the *least* conspiratorially inclined toward the Soviets of the NSC members. He sharply criticised the tendency of many in the U.S. to see the Soviets as “infallible” and the assumption that all of their actions were part of a larger conspiracy. He felt the Soviets were merely trying to make the best of a bad situation, though he did note that the Soviets could still snatch a “victory” from destalinisation.²⁹ The contrast with Foster Dulles’ comments about the Soviets in previous years was striking. Foster Dulles was no longer presenting the Soviets as cloak and dagger

²⁶ “Memo: Beam to UnderSecState,” June 27, 1956.

²⁷ “DeptState PR-360.”

²⁸ “Meeting Digest, Allen Dulles.”

²⁹ “Memo: 289th NSC Meeting,” June 28, 1956, AWF, NSCS, Box 8, DDEL.

communists with every move planned out in advance. To a degree, he was giving their actions the benefit of the doubt.

Dulles certainly felt that the Soviets were still a threat. But this did not mean that the U.S. should dismiss the changes that resulted from destalinisation. Instead, the administration should resist the tendency to view the USSR as perpetually unchanging. This was a monumental statement from Dulles. He thought the pressing question was whether the U.S. should continue to ostracise the men in the Kremlin, or, help them along the path towards liberalisation. Dulles was inclined towards the latter. Pressing his point, he told the NSC that the changes in the USSR were both genuine and meaningful. At any rate, the allies were taking the changes seriously, which necessitated the U.S. do so as well for the sake of unity.³⁰

The events since the 20th Party Congress added up to enough to change Dulles' mind about the possibility of change in the USSR. A threshold was reached: whereas previously any number of Soviet gestures and policy changes since Stalin's death were dismissed as 'tactical' or 'Soviet ploys', Dulles was now convinced that destalinisation was the real deal. Khrushchev and the other leaders were serious about eliminating Stalinism. This did not remove the Soviet threat but it did alter it in a direction that could be beneficial to U.S. policy.

Dulles' statements differed depending on the audience. In private, such as with the NSC, he was openly optimistic about destalinisation. But in public, his comments remained hedged; though he acknowledged the possibility of change, he always encouraged western unity towards the Soviets or emphasised that western policies were the source of the current Soviet spasms.³¹

A Quickening Pace of Change

While Dulles' acknowledgement of change in the USSR proceeded the Kremlin pressed ahead with destalinisation. In late June it published a number of documents written by Lenin. Among these were notes of his written shortly before his death, and a letter to the Party Congress of December 1922. Stalin had kept these secret, but in the context of destalinisation the Soviet leadership found

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "'Newly Released Lenin Documents...'", Froslid to Williamson," June 30, 1956, TCD, Box 3, Folder 42, HL.

them very useful. Lenin's criticism of Stalin lent enormous credibility to the anti-Stalin campaign. The documents illustrated Lenin's treatment of his opponents- Trotsky, Zinoviev and Kamenev- as "humane". This was interpreted by the State Department as a method of gathering historical precedent for the current leaders' code of conduct.³²

Yet this openness and criticism of Stalin created problem for the Kremlin. Party discipline needed to be upheld. In order to clearly draw the line between accepted anti-Stalin criticism and excessive anti-Party attacks the Central Committee published "On Overcoming the Personality Cult and its Consequences" in *Pravda* on 30 June. Bohlen thought it meant to answer questions generated by the Secret Speech, for instance: how was the Stalin cult possible in the Soviet system? Why did the other leaders not remove Stalin? The decree explained that the historical necessities of capitalist encirclement, class enemies and rapid industrialisation required extreme discipline. This, in combination with Stalin's personality, allowed him to become dictator. Furthermore, the decree argued that Stalin's crimes did not come to light until after his death.³³

The Soviet leaders were careful to emphasise that the cult of personality was not implicit to the Soviet system- obviously since they sought reform it rather than abolish it. But they also took Dulles' comments into consideration. Bohlen noted that the decree also listed the support of the Chinese, French and British Communist Parties in the anti-Stalin campaign. This was key: if destalinisation was only short term or tactical, there would not have any reason to go to such lengths to offer justification and gain support.³⁴ Bohlen felt the Soviets were more apt to tell the truth in publications, and this appeared to be the case with their assertion that destalinisation was not a hasty decision, but rather was a process that began with Stalin's death. The decree was aimed not only for domestic Soviet consumption, but also at foreign communist parties. The varied and confused response of a number of communist leaders abroad was not a surprise to the Soviet leaders. The decree was meant to clarify destalinisation, but the fact that

³² "OIR Report on Release of Lenin Letters," June 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA; "'Newly Released Lenin Documents...'", Froslid to Williamson"; "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.7," July 2, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

³³ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.19," July 2, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

³⁴ Ibid.

the Soviets went ahead with destalinisation apparently without consulting or informing foreign communist parties highlighted the reduced influence of the Kremlin abroad. As Bohlen viewed it, this was part of a larger shift by the Kremlin that was underpinned by the ideological changes codified at the 20th Party Congress: the emphasis on national roads to socialism and the equal treatment of communist parties meant more independence for the satellites, but also less control for the Kremlin. The Soviets hoped to improve their image by liberalising. Only time would tell if this plan would bear fruit.³⁵

Compared with the analysis of the Decree in Washington, Bohlen was optimistic. An intelligence memorandum prepared for Dulles reiterated much of what Bohlen said, but added that the resolution was “superficial, transparent and hackneyed”. Dulles’ intelligence staff informed him that it illustrated how hard the Soviet leaders would find it to explain Stalinism so long as they prevented discussion of the Soviet system as a whole.³⁶ Deputy head of DRS, Boris Klosson, leaked to *Time* that the Soviet attempt to stem the criticism of destalinisation would fail so long as the Soviets refused to admit that there were no checks on power inherent in the Soviet system.³⁷ Those under Dulles continued to push a more rigid view of the Soviet system, but Dulles had since adopted, contrary to his intelligence staff and the head of the Russian section, a much more pliable stance towards destalinisation- at least in private. This was no small change.

Ironically, while Dulles was opening up this thinking about destalinisation and the prospect of change in the USSR, Kennan was in many ways doing the opposite. His reports to the CIA stressed the Stalinist nature of the Central Committee decree, citing the explanation of Stalin’s ability to consolidate power as due to “capitalist encirclement” as a thoroughly Stalinist excuse. Kennan felt that the apparent differences in foreign policy between the current leadership and Stalin were tactical.³⁸

Yet the differences in action in terms of Soviet relationships with foreign communist parties were significant. If anything they were one of the most

³⁵ “Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.29,” July 4, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

³⁶ Memo Prepared in the Office of the Special Assistant for Intelligence, July 3, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 124-125.

³⁷ “‘The Kremlin Alibi’, Beal to Boyle,” July 5, 1956, TCD, Box 3, Folder 43, HL.

³⁸ Memo From the Deputy Director (Plans) of Central Intelligence (Wisner) to the Deputy Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Murphy), July 4, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 125-127.

concrete examples of the break the current Soviet leaders were making with Stalinism. The CIA noted the tension that the Secret Speech had produced, especially between Moscow and European communist parties. The Chinese Communist Party was also dismayed- publishing a half-hearted endorsement of destalinisation. Moscow was criticised for its failure to inform foreign communist parties of destalinisation the lack of direction given after the Secret Speech. More damningly, there was a chorus demanding more to be done to prevent future abuses of power. To guarantee 'socialist legality' it was not simply enough to simply acknowledge Stalin's crimes. In this vein, Western communist parties noted that the Soviet leaders could not be absolved of all crimes- at the very least they did nothing to stop Stalin.

The CIA thought that Western communist parties were generating centrifugal forces on their own. The Soviet model was widely acknowledged as a blueprint. However, it could no longer be so rigidly followed due to varying conditions abroad. The CIA thought the Soviets acknowledged as much in allowing national roads to socialism, but still felt they could maintain control by allowing national adjustments to the Soviet model that would prevent the rise of genuine splits. In the satellites, loyalty would be guaranteed through economic dependency. Although the Soviet plan itself was extremely risky, the CIA found the situation very dangerous for the West. The danger from communist expansion could increase due the new Soviet relationship with the communist movement generally. The CIA insisted a more flexible approach was less threatening and thereby more difficult to counter. The CIA thought destalinisation was created a "post-Stalin concept of victory": socialism would be achieved in individual nations according to national conditions, and these nations would then be gradually merged together until they lost all national identity. This polycentric strategy was well suited to this relaxed atmosphere in Europe that the Soviets were fostering.³⁹

³⁹ "The Present Communist Controversy: Its Ramifications and Possible Repercussions", CIA/SRS-2, July 15, 1956. Ibid., 128-136. The CIA was thinking about this from a Western point of view. The idea that the Soviets sought to eliminate national identity was not a way of advancing the communist cause. In other words, it was not an attack on nationalism as the enemy of communism. The CIA thought it was a way to increase Soviet imperial control over the satellites.

The CIA recognised that the CPSU was moving away from Stalinist style relationships with foreign communist parties. This was an implicit acknowledgement of destalinisation. Yet it drew alarming conclusions. It insisted that the Soviets had not lost control of the communist movement. The satellites were so tightly bound together that Soviet leaders would not countenance major deviation. Thus the 'national roads' line was aimed at the developing world (but would have its greatest impacts in Eastern Europe). Allen Dulles noted that the Soviets found themselves in a bind: they needed to continue destalinisation, but also needed to put a brake on the debates surrounding it that could inadvertently hurt them.⁴⁰ Asserting that the Soviets had control over the communist movement abroad, but highlighting the fact that the Soviets were unable to frame the debate around destalinisation meant that the CIA itself was unsure of how events were proceeding. Credible intelligence was severely lacking, but destalinisation was of such monumental importance that the CIA was compelled to analyse the situation, even if that meant coming to conclusions that were often muddled, or worse, based in part on out-of-date perceptions. Yet the CIA was no longer asking *if* there was change, but rather *how* the change would hurt the USSR.

The lack of certainty in CIA opinions was even more apparent when different views were considered. Bohlen reported in August that destalinisation was proceeding smoothly; he specifically denied that there was any atmosphere of crisis. The London embassy cabled that there was no instability in the Kremlin: destalinisation was a "hot potato", but Khrushchev was firmly in charge.⁴¹ In a series of reports that specifically evaluated the effects of destalinisation on the organisation of the CPSU, the embassy concluded that contrary to CIA reports of 'runaway' destalinisation or leadership instability, destalinisation was increasing the power of the Party. Though destalinisation began in 1953, the Secret Speech had initiated a new level of openness and directness in the Party. This was deliberate. The secret police were firmly placed in a subordinate position and the discipline enforced by Stalin was relaxed. As a result, the leadership realised that the Party itself needed to be transformed into a more powerful instrument of

⁴⁰ "Memo: 291st NSC Meeting," July 19, 1956, AWF, NSCS, Box 8, DDEL; "Current Intelligence Weekly," July 26, 1956, CREST, CIA RDP79-00927A000900050001-9, NARA.

⁴¹ "Letter: Bohlen to Kennan," August 12, 1956, GFKP, Box 5, Folder 16, ML; "Cable: Aldrich to SecState, No.429," July 25, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

persuasion and discipline. But in order to do this the Soviet leaders needed to introduce a limited amount of democracy in the lower levels of the Party. This would eliminate some of the harmful practices of the Stalin era such as whitewashing reports and hiding shortcomings. This would encourage initiative and Party. But the embassy saw that this new openness was limited to lower levels of the Party.⁴²

Despite their rocky history of disagreement, DRS echoed much of what the Moscow embassy said, specifically noting that destalinisation must be viewed against the reality of Stalin's absence, and the need for the new leaders to rule collectively while avoiding the practices of the Stalin era. The decision to change from passive destalinisation to the assertive form that came after the Secret Speech could have been for several reasons, perhaps something unforeseen happened during the opening days of the 20th Party Congress. DRS acknowledged that Bohlen and the Moscow embassy disagreed with this idea. But they also admitted that the departure could have been due to a need to clarify what was 'good' and 'bad' Stalinism. It could also have been born of a need to remove Stalinism among second-level party leaders, which remained rife, and thus avoid future accusations of deviation if present destalinisation policies failed.⁴³

Such conclusions illustrated a level of convergence between those in Moscow and Washington. But the reality was that differing views on the progression of destalinisation caused policy to languish. Eisenhower and Dulles faced the challenge of reconciling their changed perceptions in the face of disagreement from their advisors and other experts. In this situation maintaining the course of caution was the best way forward.

Press Reactions to the Secret Speech

The release of the Secret Speech caused a revival of the scepticism in the media that characterised the initial response to the 20th Party Congress. The State Department kept a thorough recording of this. Commentators claimed that the

⁴² "Despatch: Guthrie to SecState No.73," August 10, 1956, RG59, BPA, Subject Files of the PPS 1946-62, Box 46, Soviet and Related Problems, NARA; "Despatch: Guthrie to Dept State, No.73," August 19, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

⁴³ "Memo: Larson to Armstrong, MacArthur," August 30, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA; "Memo: Larson to Evans with Attachment 'De-Stalinization and the Khrushchev Secret Speech,'" August 31, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 14, Anti-Stalin Campaign, NARA.

Secret Speech itself was proof that although Stalin was gone, terror was still used in the USSR. A common refrain was that the Secret Speech was designed to exculpate the Soviet leaders from Stalin's crimes, but it failed to condemn political terror in general. Indeed, the *New York Herald Tribune* paraphrased Dulles that "a change of tune does not indicate a change of heart" and that the speech did not change the general attitude of the Soviets towards repression and violence.⁴⁴ To be sure, doubt was a common theme among journalists and public figures, which stressed that the U.S. must remain vigilant until there was a "...genuine lessening of the dictatorial powers wielded by [the] Soviet leaders." Others emphasised that the new Soviet line was only window dressing. Senator Bridges agreed, noting that nothing indicated a change in the goal of world communism. The *Wall Street Journal* was among the most outspoken, stating that "[n]either a hint of mutiny, nor dropping the pilot is proof enough that Russia's destination is still not world domination" and that the current liberalisation was easily reversed. Walter Lippmann wrote that the present relaxation would only last so long as there were no internal or external crises for the Soviets. The Scripps-Howard papers were naturally critical, arguing, "it takes more than an anti-Stalin speech to convert barbarians." To an extent these feelings were a reflection of public scepticism of destalinisation. 63 percent of those asked felt that there was no chance that the Soviets would change their policies and make peace with the West in the coming years- the highest number since Stalin's death.⁴⁵ Yet there were positive sentiments: many voiced their agreement in the decision to release the speech.

But the knowledge of Khrushchev's actual words, combined with the persistence of destalinisation since 1953 caused a number of observers to conclude that the U.S. needed to pay more heed to change afoot in the USSR. Destalinisation resulted in a "vastly differently Russia to deal with". Even commentators that were critical of destalinisation admitted that even if the Soviets had not abandoned their objectives of creating chaos, this did not preclude

⁴⁴ "Daily Opinion Summary," June 6, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2694-2820, Jan-June 1956, 1, NARA; "Daily Opinion Summary," June 14, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2694-2820, Jan-June 1956, 1, NARA.

⁴⁵ "Daily Opinion Summary," June 8, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2694-2820, Jan-June 1956, 1, NARA; "Daily Opinion Summary," June 14, 1956; "Daily Opinion Summary," June 28, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2694-2820, Jan-June 1956, 1, NARA; "Monthly Survey of American Opinion No.183," August 2, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 12, Monthly Survey 1956, 2, NARA.

changes taking place in the Kremlin. The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* emphasised that the Soviet Union was far from democratic, but that the new line represented a serious change from Stalinism. The reaction of the administration was criticised as well. *Christian Science Monitor* editorials argued that the "State Department reaction that nothing has change about the USSR is an oversimplification" and that an attachment to "fixed ideas" was preventing the administration from recognising the changes in the USSR. The *Boston Herald* warned that the U.S. should be weary of its own propaganda- lest the Soviets "turn over a new leaf" and the U.S. fail to see it.⁴⁶

The consensus had changed. No longer was *everything* the Soviets did suspect. A number of outlets, such as the *Boston Herald* and *Christian Science Monitor* noted the importance of not maintaining old perceptions out of mere habit. This represented an important change in the history of the Cold War thus far: a point at which it was popularly recognised that old perceptions of the Soviets as expansionist and devious was not necessarily the most beneficial way of viewing the situation for U.S. policy. In fact the change in media opinion was reflective of Dulles' own changed opinion of destalinisation. Though he still harboured a great deal of hesitation towards Soviet gestures and public doubt towards destalinisation, he no longer discounted it wholesale.

'No Basic Change' No More?

Dulles' own divisions over the change in the USSR reflected a greater cleavage within both the government and the U.S. in general about the nature of destalinisation. The Secret Speech caused a debate over whether the events in the USSR were indicative of serious changes that could impact policy. These broadly fell into two groups. The first acknowledged the scope of the changes wrought by destalinisation and encouraged the Eisenhower administration to take advantage of them to improve relations, or at least to exploit it for propaganda purposes. The second group remained wedded to the idea that nothing had changed in the USSR, and that destalinisation was a red herring. They relied on the interpretation that since Soviet objectives had not changed there had been no fundamental change in the position of the Soviets. This 'fundamentalist' group repeated *ad*

⁴⁶ "Daily Opinion Summary," June 6, 1956; "Daily Opinion Summary," June 14, 1956; "Daily Opinion Summary," June 28, 1956.

nauseaum that there was ‘no basic change’ in Soviet objectives, and as such, there should be no change in U.S. policy towards the USSR.

By the middle of 1956 the Eisenhower administration acknowledged that destalinisation necessitated a rethink of existing national security policies, particularly those dealing with the Satellites.⁴⁷ But this in itself did not mean there was a fundamental shift in how U.S. viewed destalinisation. Rather, it was the modified views of Dulles and others that illustrated this change. Yet given the anxiety and tension of the Cold War, it could hardly be expected that anyone would adopt radically altered perceptions of the Soviet threat in such a relatively small period of time: Dulles’ hedged statements bore witness to this. Rather, the devil was in the details. Statements by some members of the administration, and some outside it, highlighted the movement toward accepting the post-Stalin reality in the Kremlin.

Harrison Salisbury noted “[t]oward the outside world Russia has substituted the Big Smile for the Big Frown.”⁴⁸ He contended that the new Soviet manner evident since 1953: a lighter touch domestically and a more “pleasant flexible manner” in foreign policy, amounted to a Soviet “New Look”. But he was quick to question whether something fundamental had changed since Stalin’s death; was Moscow “...no longer working for the world-wide victory of communism?” In doing so he highlighted what many in the U.S. considered the only thing that a fundamental change could be: the complete abandonment of communism. Salisbury himself thought that the Soviet leaders had postponed their goals of communist conquest, and even altered their basic theories behind it. Yet they still believed that communism would triumph. Salisbury rhetorically queried whether this amounted to a ‘fundamental’ change. He pointed to the end of hostilities in Korea, the lessening of tension of Europe and Soviet development of nuclear weapons, and the persistent development of light industry (even after Malenkov’s departure) as harbingers of “big change” in the USSR. Salisbury painted the picture of a drastically changed landscape since 1953. He conceded that long-term Soviet goals were likely unchanged. But in the short term the new

⁴⁷ Gregory Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin: America’s Strategy to Subvert the Soviet Bloc, 1947-1956* (London: Cornell University Press, 2000), 172.

⁴⁸ See, for example: “The Smiling Offensive.”

Soviet posture vastly improved the situation- and the destruction of the Stalin myth was most important in this regard. Salisbury emphasised that nothing was more important than the fact that one-man rule was eliminated.⁴⁹

In a similar vein Louis Halle told Adlai Stevenson that there were two groups of thought about destalinisation. One was the “all-or-nothing boys” who would only accept total surrender from the Soviets as any sort of meaningful change. Halle posited Dulles as the leader of this group, which served to highlight the nature of Dulles’ public statements regarding the Soviet Union since the 20th Party Congress, in contrast to his private ruminations in which he considered the changes real. Halle had no way of knowing that he was wrong, and that Dulles’ views were actually converging with his own. Consequently, he blamed the resistance to acknowledge (openly) that there was real change in the USSR on Dulles, and disparaged Eisenhower for simply following Dulles’ lead.

The second group was the “half a cake is better than none boys”, who considered the changes to be positive, even if they did not alter ultimate Soviet objectives. Halle included himself in this group as he told Stevenson:

Of course Moscow hasn’t changed its objective of a Communist world. We can’t expect that it will- at least until it decides to commit suicide at our behest. What counts, however, is not so much a regime’s ultimate objective as what it does for its realization- i.e., its “tactics.”

Halle likened the change in Soviet tactics to the spread and objectives of Islam. It too had tried violence to spread its message, but this did not prevent the U.S. from cooperating with Muslim states. The USSR was not about to abandon its objectives, no matter the strength of the free world. But the Soviets could settle for certain limits and this seemed to be happening. Halle stressed that the answer now was not to press for a total abandonment of communism. This would only backfire. The Soviets would only give up communism through defeat via nuclear war. In this case, Halle judged it better to take the path of Islam and let the Soviets keep their objectives.⁵⁰ He thought that the administration made a hash of the opportunities that destalinisation presented. The hard-line utterances of Dulles since 1953 were especially counterproductive since they only provided fodder for

⁴⁹ Harrison Salisbury, “Russia Since Stalin,” June 1956, HSP Box 173, Folder 5, CUL.

⁵⁰ Of course Halle had no way of knowing that Dulles’ views were beginning to converge with his. Consequently, he blamed the resistance to acknowledge (openly) that there was real change in the USSR on Dulles, and disparaged Eisenhower for simply following Dulles’ lead. “Letter: Halle to Stevenson,” July 9, 1956.

those in the Kremlin who wanted to continue along Stalinist lines. Instead, Halle recommended that Stevenson say he would invite Khrushchev to the U.S. to meet 'normal' Americans. But he also advised that Stevenson be firm with Khrushchev at the same time, and explain that the U.S. was easy to get along with, so long as the USSR abandoned Stalinism.⁵¹ Though he was in contact with Robert Bowie, his impact was hard to gauge. But he may have helped change Bowie's mind, and through this conduit, Dulles'. Either way, Halle's thoughts highlighted that recognition of the scope of destalinisation was occurring outside the administration in other elite political circles.

Even the most reticent to accept any change in the Kremlin were coming around. In examining the Soviet visit to the UK in April, the OIR highlighted that the Soviet leaders were utilising personal contacts with foreign governments to promote a respectable image of the Soviet regime and promote their peaceful intentions. Of course the OIR discounted the possibility that the Soviets were engaged in the sort of respectable diplomacy that was practiced in the West, instead suspecting ulterior motives. Nevertheless, implicit in the OIR's conclusion was recognition of change on the part of the Soviet leaders and their methods.⁵² Gone were the days of Molotov and *nyet*.

It was this sort of begrudging acknowledgement that was recognisable in the State Department over the latter half of 1956. Reports still commonly cited the danger the USSR posed, but now freely highlighted the changes underway in the USSR. A statement written for Robert Murphy in his appearance before the House Foreign Affairs Committee was typical. It emphasised a number of changes in the Soviet system: improvements in living conditions, more political flexibility, and a reduction in police power. In foreign policy, it argued that Stalin's policies had been negative for the USSR. Thus, the current line of coexistence was a step away from that- as the rapprochement with Tito illustrated.

These changes were identified as remnants of Stalinism that hurt the Soviet system in general. As such, they were not made out of any humanitarian

⁵¹ "Letter: Halle to Stevenson," August 9, 1956.

⁵² "IR-7264: Visit of Bulganin and Khrushchev to Britain," June 11, 1956, RG59, BIR, Intel Reports on USSR and Eastern Europe 1942-1960, Box 22, IR-7264, NARA.

motives. The State Department noticed the liberalising nature of the changes. However, it concluded that:

...the evident purpose is to bolster rather than change fundamentals of the system...generally, Stalinist methods have been put aside in favor of a more flexible and imaginative, but no less vigorous, drive to oust U.S. influence from the world between us and the USSR...⁵³

Thus the State Department, whilst recognising the reforms that the Kremlin had embarked upon, was limited in how far it would admit they changed the Soviet threat. Since the fundamental objectives of the USSR were unchanged, then the U.S. must remain wary. This was precisely the interpretation that Halle railed against: minimising the changes that *were* taking place due to the fact that the Soviets remained communist meant that the U.S. could not adjust its posture to take into account these very changes. Nevertheless, Murphy's statement reflected a new level of candour on the part of the State Department. As a statement written for Congress it is questionable whether it was an accurate depiction of high-level thinking. It is entirely possible that Murphy overstated the unchanged nature of Soviet objectives in order to prevent sounding too favourable towards destalinisation. Other than Dulles, Murphy's statement is the highest-ranking documentation from the State Department that a questioning acceptance of the changes in the USSR was spreading. To be sure, this part of a longer term change in mindset toward the Soviet Union that would prove to have profound repercussions.

Yet there was still a great deal of embedded scepticism of any action the Soviets took. Dulles himself was unconvinced with the recent Soviet reduction in forces. Deborah Welch Larson cites this as an instance to prove her larger point that concessions made by adversaries are discarded if they are easily reversible. Dulles identified the troop reductions in just this way.⁵⁴ Yet there is an important distinction between the reduction in the size of the Soviet army and the ideological changes wrought by destalinisation. Unlike the troop reductions, destalinisation could not be easily reversed. There was no doubt that the Soviets were adept at modifying their doctrine to fit circumstances, but destalinisation

⁵³ RH Trezise, "Statement for House Foreign Affairs Committee: Soviet Developments and Their Meaning for U.S. Foreign Policy," October 10, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 113, S/P Working Papers, Oct 1956, NARA.

⁵⁴ Larson, *Mistrust*, 29.

was a vastly larger undertaking than Lenin's New Economic Policy, the embrace of Popular Fronts, or even Malenkov's abortive emphasis on consumer goods. Destalinisation combined structural reforms to both the state and economy with its most powerful effect: the destruction of Stalin as a symbol. Such distinctions had been brought to Dulles' attention since July 1953. He consistently rejected Soviet changes as tactical until the 20th Party Congress, which was a milestone for doctrinal changes and destalinisation, not for more tangible changes like military reductions. Consequently Dulles reassessed his stance toward the USSR.

Others were not so sure. Adenauer felt that destalinisation made the Soviets more dangerous than ever, and that it was merely a plot to lull western vigilance. Publicly Dulles continued his line that the U.S. must remain on guard, but he was torn between allies like Adenauer, who thought that the Soviets were more dangerous than ever, and others like French Foreign Minister Pineau, who declared he was ready to accept the Soviet 'new look' at "face value". In the American press, comments like Pineau's were thrashed for their naïveté. As a result, Dulles found himself in the position of having to placate not only various allies, but also a powerful faction of the U.S. media, which remained hostile to the idea that the Soviets were becoming less of a threat. The harsh reaction of much of the press to the Soviet military reductions also contributed to his reticence to publicly acknowledge its veracity, even if, as previously mentioned, he did feel it was genuine.⁵⁵

As such, the position Dulles of in public continued to be one of scepticism. His speeches cautiously welcomed the changes in the USSR, but stressed that they did not prevent the return of Stalinism. Dulles publicly concluded that only democracy could prevent the rise of another Stalin. He continued to refrain that the Soviets were only changing their positions because previous ones had failed. He cited Yugoslavia as the paramount example of Stalinist foreign policy failure, followed by a *volte-face* under the current leaders. Playing to his domestic audience, Dulles emphasised his desire for the Soviets to unify Germany and

⁵⁵ "Monthly Survey of American Opinion No.182," July 3, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 12, Monthly Survey 1956, 2, NARA.

leave the Satellites.⁵⁶ But despite these statements, Dulles introduced a startling degree of optimism, as the following exchange at a press conference illustrated:

Q: Mr. Secretary...can we derive from that you feel this transformation in the Soviet Union may well alter Soviet aggression that has been so troublesome over the years?

A: ...I believe the forces that are now working are going to prove to be irresistible. That does not mean that will happen today or tomorrow...but I believe this second post-war decade in which we are will see these new forces take charge of the situation and that we can really hopefully look forward to a transformation of the international scene.⁵⁷

Traditional historiography paints Dulles as a dour figure, and certainly not one given to sunny outlooks. This makes it important to note the instances such as these when Dulles was optimistic. He further acknowledged the new Soviet line in the wake of the Poznan riots. Conferring with Eisenhower at his Gettysburg farm he noted the dilemma the Soviets were in: their 'new course' relied on liberalisation to win over the satellites. But after Poznan, the Soviets were stuck between allowing liberalisation to go further, which was a slippery slope, and reverting to "Stalinist style" repression. If they chose the latter, Dulles said, they would forfeit any gains that they had made with the West as a result of destalinisation.⁵⁸ This statement was revelatory: Dulles noted that Stalinism would have to be "reverted" to, and admitted the gains as a result of the changes of destalinisation. In private Dulles had come to accept the reality of change in the USSR.

The State Department continued to reject the Soviet changes and avoid any expression of optimism in public. Instead, both internal documents and public statements reflected the same level of doubt in the Soviet changes as they had since the 20th Party Congress, and indeed since 1953. The onus remained on the fact that worldwide communism remained the Soviet objective, that the current leaders were "Stalin's progeny". Indeed, the State Department still clung to the idea that foreign communist parties were beholden completely to Moscow.⁵⁹ Even if there was a wider trend in the State Department to explore destalinisation

⁵⁶ "Draft of Dulles Speech," July 9, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 29, OCB Committee on Soviet Problems III, NARA; "DeptState PR-380," July 11, 1956, JFDP, Box 109, Soviet Union and Communist Party 1956, ML.

⁵⁷ "DeptState PR-380."

⁵⁸ Memcon: Eisenhower and Dulles, July 13, 1956, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 127-128.

⁵⁹ "Memo: Armstrong to UnderSecState, with Attachment 'Soviet Leaders Attack Stalin and Absolve Communist System,'" July 10, 1956, RG59, BIR, Subject Files, 1945-56, Box 13, USSR Miscellaneous, NARA.

from a U.S. perspective, to do so was dangerous. Given Dulles' sensitivity to Congressional opinion, the State Department had little to gain and much to lose by altering their public stance towards destalinisation. The Bureau of Public Affairs (BPA) knew as much. Polls found a great deal of scepticism toward the Soviet "new look" among the public. The BPA noted that some newspapers encouraged the State Department to be more proactive in fostering freedom in the Soviet bloc, though the *Christian Science Monitor* presciently discouraged any moves that could encourage resistance behind the Iron Curtain that the U.S. could not actively support. Indeed, Dulles' public scepticism of destalinisation, and of other Soviet actions such as the reduction in forces, drew praise among much of the press.⁶⁰ Such public opinion would have militated any inclination to publicly acknowledge the reality of destalinisation. Indeed, in October Murphy maintained the line that there was little change of relevance for the U.S. He admitted that the USSR had changed since Stalin's death, but then fell back on the cliché that the Soviets were committed to communist ideology, and by implication, sought world domination.⁶¹

⁶⁰ "Survey No.183"; "Survey No.182."

⁶¹ RH Trezise, "Statement for House Foreign Affairs Committee: Soviet Developments and Their Meaning for U.S. Foreign Policy," October 10, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 113, S/P Working Papers, Oct 1956, NARA; Academics also expressed doubt about destalinisation. Walt Rostow was unambiguously critical of the Soviet changes. He thought the changes since 1953 were "superficial" and that the U.S. still faced a "life-and-death challenge". The current Soviet actions were simply "salami tactics". "Rostow Speech: 'The Challenge Facing the United States,'" September 20, 1956, DDEL, CDJP, Box 91, Rostow, Walt W., 1956, NARA; Rostow's comments were the logical extension of the argument he had made in the press that Lenin led directly to Stalin, and thus the current system was completely unchanged. This was significant coming from one of the heads of CENIS, but unsurprising given the positions of CENIS in the past. Others in academia agreed with Rostow. See: Albert Parry, "The Twentieth Congress: Stalin's 'Second Funeral,'" *American Slavic and East European Review* 15, no. 4 (December 1956): 474-475; Robert Tucker disagreed with Rostow and Parry. He did not think that Stalin was a natural outcome of the Soviet system, let alone from Lenin directly. The Party dictatorship at best made Stalinism a possibility. Tucker rejected the idea that Stalin's death would not change anything, and argued that "...nothing much could change in the Soviet Union until Stalin died, and also why various things immediately began to change when he did die. De-Stalinization did not start with Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in early 1956"; rather it began in 1953 since "Stalin's death *had* to mean de-Stalinization. The Stalinist political order was a one-person system." Tucker noted that although Khrushchev was claiming Lenin's name, he was hardly giving the USSR "a new NEP". Rather, the basic government structure remained much the same. But within this Tucker noted significant changes: the Central Committee grew in power and the Presidium was reduced in size. Actual political debate was now common in the Presidium and votes held if necessary. Robert C. Tucker, "The Politics of Soviet De-Stalinization," *World Politics* 9, no. 4 (July 1957): 555, 560-562, 568, 573; "Cable: Aldrich to SecState, No.429," July 25, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA; Other Soviet specialists reported on the changed situation outside the Kremlin. Louis Fisher related the ease with which people discussed the regime. In contrast to the Stalin period, Soviet citizens would meet with him openly. "Cable: Embassy in the

Chapter Conclusion

In the wake of the 20th Party Congress there were important changes to the perceptions held by many in the administration. The more nuanced outlook towards the changes in the USSR since 1953 advocated in various guises by Bohlen, Fuller, Armstrong, and Bowie, as well as Kennan and Halle outside the administration, proved to be prescient. Indeed, the inclination of Dulles in the closing months of 1955 to think that the Soviet Union was indeed changing to the benefit of the U.S. seemed to be coming true.

The Secret Speech provided further impetus for this change in perception. Acceptance of destalinisation as something real that would have profound effects only U.S.-Soviet relations was proceeding apace. Yet perceptions of the USSR and its leaders intentions had only begun to change- perceptions that had been honed through years of interaction with the USSR and communism. The last few months of 1956 would make it clear to all concerned how far reaching destalinisation would be, and the impact it could have on U.S. policy. It was ironic then, that the events in Poland and Hungary illustrated to U.S. policymakers how important destalinisation was, and yet the outcome of the unrest would delay a wider acceptance of liberalisation in the USSR. But the opinion of Eisenhower and Dulles that destalinisation now needed to be taken seriously was not shaken as much as may have been expected, and this, perhaps more than anything, showed how far their perceptions had come since 1953.

United Kingdom to StateDept, September 24, 1956". *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1989), 137-138.

Chapter 8: The Effects of Destalinisation before Poland and Hungary

Many of the changes wrought by destalinisation were intended to remedy domestic Soviet shortcomings, but arguably the most pronounced results for both the USSR and U.S. were abroad. Significant events would occur in the satellites, and at a hectic time for the Eisenhower administration. The 1956 election would be decided in November and the campaign was well underway. Foreign policy concerns such as Indochina presented an increasingly difficult situation for the U.S.¹

A number of studies have covered the history of U.S. involvement in the satellites during 1956.² However, these have not evaluated the effect that the Poznan riots, Polish October and the Hungarian Uprising had on the perceptions of destalinisation and of the Soviet leaders held by the Eisenhower administration. This gap is curious since a number of historians have noted that the U.S. response- insofar as there was a coherent response- served to solidify the division of Eastern Europe and highlight U.S. acceptance of Soviet domination.³ This chapter is intended to highlight what the effects of these events were on how the administration perceived of the changes in the Soviet bloc since Stalin's death, and specifically since the 20th Party Congress.

In the saga of changing perceptions of Soviet leaders and the Soviet system over the 1953-56 period, the Soviet responses first in Poland, and then the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising, actually did not greatly affect already changing perceptions. One would have expected Eisenhower and Dulles to

¹ Günter Bischof, "United States Responses to the Soviet Suppression of Rebellions in the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 22 (March 15, 2011): 63.

² In addition to those works cited in this chapter, see for example: Scott Lucas, *Freedom's War: The U.S. Crusade Against The Soviet Union, 1945-56* (Manchester, 1999); Kovrig, *The Myth of Liberation*; Mitrovich, *Undermining the Kremlin*; Charles Gati, *Failed Illusions: Moscow, Washington, Budapest, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolt* (Washington, D.C.; Stanford, Calif.: Woodrow Wilson Center, 2006); David Allan Mayers, *The Ambassadors and America's Soviet Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Csaba Bekes, "East Central Europe, 1953-1956," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, vol. I (Cambridge: CUP, 2010); Csaba Bekes, "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics," *CWIHP Working Paper Series*, no. No. 16 (n.d.), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/topics/pubs/ACFB4E.pdf>; Csaba Bekes, Malcolm Byrne, and M. Jaanos Rainer, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution: A History in Documents* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2002).

³ Csaba Bekes, "Cold War, Detente, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution," in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?*, ed. Klaus Larres and Kenneth Osgood (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 214; Bischof, "U.S. Responses to the Soviet Suppression of Rebellions," 63.

conclude that Russian tanks in Budapest meant a return to Stalinism. However, this reversion never happened. Of course, public rhetoric remained hostile and spoke of freedom and the violence of Soviet communism. In private however, no one in the administration who had come to accept the reality of destalinisation prior to October changed their opinion of it as a result of Poland or Hungary. Those who had been opposed to the idea of destalinisation representing genuine change also remained opposed to any conciliation with the USSR. Both groups found reasons to maintain their convictions. This is not surprising since they both had found reasons not to change their positions in the progression of destalinisation in the satellites since February 1956.

U.S. Evaluation of Destalinisation in the Soviet Bloc since the 20th Party Congress

It did not take long for the U.S. to realise the implications of destalinisation for the satellites, if for no other reason than many in the administration saw a similar rationale behind destalinisation in both the USSR and the Soviet bloc. Dulles mused that the denunciation of Stalin could simply be a way of getting the population of the satellite nations to like the Soviets more.⁴ This was much the same rationale used in evaluating destalinisation and its domestic effects in the USSR.

But less cerebral musings such as this should not be taken as indicative of all U.S. assessments of destalinisation in the satellites. The administration recognised the significant implications of destalinisation prior to the 20th Party Congress. In January NIE 12-56 forecast that over the next five years nationalism and deviationism would continue to spread in the Soviet Bloc. It also noted that Moscow would be willing to alter its method of control to take into account local conditions.⁵ This was actually less prescient than it sounded since the changes announced at the Congress were acknowledgements of policy alternations made since 1953. What it did show, however, was that the intelligence establishment in the U.S. noted the acceptance of both national roads to socialism by Moscow and the increased decentralisation of control.

⁴ Kovrig, *The Myth of Liberation*, 165.

⁵ "Probable Developments in the European Satellites Through 1960", NIE 12-56, January 10, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25*, 115-118.

The release of NSC-5602 in March highlighted the knowledge of destalinisation in the satellites and its possible implications. The NSC asserted that no upsurge in nationalism in the satellites would make the Soviets release them from their grip. This, in combination with improved relations with the West, would kill off any remaining hope of liberation in the bloc. The NSC highlighted the opportunities and dangers resulting from destalinisation in the satellites:

An extended period of reduced international tensions and wider East-West contacts would present problems for the Bloc as well as the West. The relaxation of harsh police controls may be difficult to reverse, and the promise of higher standards of living may be difficult to abandon. If a change in Soviet foreign policy required reversion to a policy of sacrifices enforced by drastic controls, internal discontent would result, although it could almost certainly be kept in check. A relaxation of domestic controls and of the atmosphere of hostility in East-West relations could, if continued over the much longer run, combine with other factors ultimately to create pressures for change within the Bloc...⁶

In the spring of 1956 it was clear to many in Washington that destalinisation threatened to destabilise the system the Soviets built. Jacob Beam noted that many of the leaders in the satellite nations were committed Stalinists—many appointed by Stalin himself. Destalinisation was a particular danger to them.⁷ The position of such ‘little Stalins’ meant that Dulles could publicly maintain scepticism of destalinisation in the satellites. He said the changes in Soviet control over the satellites were involuntary, and meant to shore up Soviet control, which appeared to be weakening. The appeal of Titoism inside the bloc was spreading.⁸ But it was an election year, and Dulles’ public stance was certainly influenced by the votes of Americans of Eastern European descent. The fact that the liberation rhetoric of 1952 proved to be hollow made this voting bloc even more vulnerable to be lost to the Democrats.⁹ Dulles would not say anything to give those with a special interest in the satellites reason to doubt the administration’s anti-communist credentials and the commitment to liberation. Yet his comments were also a public acknowledgement of change in the Soviet bloc. He raised the issue of Titoism: this was critical. It was seen as the antithesis

⁶ NSC-5602, March 15, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19*, 261.

⁷ “Memo: Beam to Acting SecState (Hoover).”

⁸ “JFD Press Conference,” April 4, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, Box 3506, 761.00/3-2155, NARA.

⁹ After the 1954 midterm elections the Democrats held the Senate by one seat (of 96 total seats), and the House of Representatives by 29 seats (of 435). This made the 1956 election extremely important. “Statistics of the Congressional Election of November 2, 1954” (Government Printing Office, 1956), 46, http://clerk.house.gov/member_info/electioninfo/1954election.pdf.

of Stalinism; after all, Tito was the only communist leader to have successfully resisted Stalin. Raising this topic in public indicated that Dulles was not only aware of the changes afoot, but also the gravity of destalinisation for the satellites.

Poland and Hungary

Although Poland and Hungary quickly proceeded with destalinisation, Dulles insisted that the Soviets were still firmly in control. The recent events indicated a 'thaw' in Poland, but he did not think they were necessarily indicative of independent policy. Typically, he insisted that the changes in Poland were a result of outside pressures on Moscow and rebuffed the comments of the British ambassador in Poland who raised the possibility of a fundamental change in the Soviet bloc. Instead he directed the embassy in Warsaw to maintain established policy: the promotion of evolutionary change in the Soviet bloc- and to do this through a firm stance towards the Soviets, rather than appeasement or cooperation.¹⁰ Once again the 1956 election played a role: Weary of appearing soft on communism, especially to voters with links to Eastern Europe, Dulles did not want to be liable of charges of appeasement, even if such a line was to the detriment of the goal of promoting evolutionary change. The irony was striking. Dulles insisted on maintaining a firm stance towards the Soviets since he publicly doubted that the changes resulting from destalinisation were significant enough to alter Soviet objectives. Even though U.S. policy was to promote *evolutionary* change, it was rejecting indications of such change on the basis of the changes not being large enough.

The Warsaw embassy responded to Dulles' comments almost verbatim. It insisted that there was no real reform going on in Poland, and the Western media was getting ahead of itself. The changes were the result of communist 'zig-zag' and any debate over destalinisation was farcical.¹¹ In contrast the PPS recognised the role of destalinisation, concluding that satellite nations were being allowed a much freer hand in implementing reforms. But it also noted that there was no loss of Soviet control.¹² The OIR agreed with this assessment, adding that the satellites

¹⁰ Instruction from DeptState to the Embassy in Poland, March 28, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25*, 131-138.

¹¹ Cable: Embassy in Poland to DeptState, March 29, 1956. *Ibid.*, 172-174.

¹² "Current Foreign Affairs Highlights," May 3, 1956, RG59 PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 110, PPS Chronological File, Jan-June 1956, NARA.

were at the vanguard of destalinisation as far as correcting the abuses of one-man Stalinist style rule.¹³ Francis Stevens told a *Time* correspondent that Poland was in the lead in condemning Stalin due to its historic anti-Russian sentiment. The public was more at ease expressing discontent with the Soviets. This illustrated that Stevens at least grasped the importance of nationalism within destalinisation. But he underlined that far from expressing weakness, the fact that the Poles were allowed to embark so enthusiastically on destalinisation was an expression of how firmly the Soviets were in control.¹⁴

By the end of April the OCB knew the situation was becoming volatile. In Poland representatives in the *Sejm* openly criticised the current Polish leadership for past cooperation with Stalin. Polish radio attacked trade unions for not protecting workers from Stalinist excesses. In Hungary Party members questioned whether there ever was a 'right deviation' under Nagy in 1953-54. In response, Moscow denounced those who used the mantle of destalinisation to attack the Party.¹⁵ Both the OCB and OIR were aware of openly expressed hatred towards Stalin and as was becoming apparent, the CPSU. The OCB and OIR analysis illustrated an increasing acceptance of the changes resulting from destalinisation.

Although there was acceptance of the importance of destalinisation, even in Dulles' public comments, the consensus was that Soviet control over the satellites was unchanged. The OCB noted that after a decade of Sovietisation, Moscow could loosen its grip without fear of losing control. The presence of Soviet troops, pliant political leaders, and Soviet advisors in the security apparatus of Poland and other satellites meant that instability was not a threat. Instead, the OCB asserted that the relaxation of Soviet control was a sign of toughness. The Soviets were maintaining control while eliminating policies that could be a liability. They could make these changes due to the strength of their position.¹⁶ This was one way to interpret the changes, but it missed the pivotal question of why the Soviets would make changes if their position was so strong? Why run the risk? No one in the OCB asked why such a gamble was being taken.

¹³ "IR-1912.3."

¹⁴ "'Poland', Beal to Gruin," May 10, 1956, TCD, Box 2, Folder 28, HL.

¹⁵ "IR-1912.3."

¹⁶ "Soviet Control of the Eastern European Satellites," June 7, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 29, OCB Committee on Soviet Problems III, NARA.

Destalinisation and the Poznan Riots

When riots against communist rule broke out in Poznan on 28 June the immediate reaction of John Foster Dulles was to tell his brother that “[w]hen they begin to crack they can crack fast. We have to keep the pressure on.”¹⁷ The following day Poznan was the predominant topic at Dulles’ staff meeting. He thought that the Soviet economy was over-extended and the U.S. should maintain pressure. Later that day he told Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson that he found the developments in Poland encouraging. If the U.S. simply held its line, other satellites would “crack”.¹⁸ However, in these initial statements there was no mention of destalinisation. Rather, the emphasis was on how U.S. pressure led to the riots in the first place- rather than any intra-bloc events. This type of self-congratulatory conclusion was not surprising. It was quite similar to the justification Dulles had applied for rejecting Soviet changes in 1953. Under pressure, Dulles in this instance seems to have reverted to the type of response he would have had towards the Soviets prior to 1956. In a way this was odd: At this point the Soviet response was not yet clear, so it cannot be said that the resultant Soviet-led repression of the riots led Dulles to believe that destalinisation was false after all.

The OCB met to discuss how best the U.S. could take advantage of the situation in Poland. Addressing the meeting as the head of SWGS, Beam stressed that the Soviets would blame the West for the riots. In preparation, as well as to damage the Soviet position, he informed the OCB that the SWGS was disseminating to the media a U.S. offer of food to the Polish Red Cross, as well as maintaining the line that the riots were caused by dissatisfied workers. It was specifically decided that no encouragement should be given to any of the satellites to revolt or riot. In the coming weeks special emphasis would be given to investigating how Moscow dealt with the riots. The OCB suggested to Beam that the U.S. compile eyewitness reports; stimulate UN action in defence of peaceful protest; and invite a statement from the International Federation of Free Trade

¹⁷ “TeleCon: AD to JFD,” June 28, 1956, DDEL, JFDP, Memo. of Tel. Conv. General May 1, 1956-June 29, 1956 (1), DDEL; This conversation is also in: *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25*, 181.

¹⁸

Unions in support of the Polish workers.¹⁹ Beam's office also compiled a number of similar suggestions for evaluation at the upcoming NATO meeting held to discuss destalinisation. The common theme was how Khrushchev was little different from Stalin.²⁰ This theme fit with the general U.S propaganda line against destalinisation, and illustrated that publicly the State Department continued to doubt the veracity of destalinisation.

With Soviet assistance the riots were quelled in a few days. It became clear, however, that although violence was used against the rioters, the aftermath was different. No mass purges or further violent repression followed. This caught the Eisenhower's and Dulles' attention, who discussed the apparent dilemma of the Kremlin: If it allowed further liberalisation, there could be more instances of revolt. If reverted to, as Dulles put it, a "*Stalinist* type of repression" then it would forfeit the gains it had made with the non-communist world in trying to appear civilised and reformed.²¹ Indeed, Eisenhower and Dulles hit upon the clearest manifestation of destalinisation for U.S. policy. They recognised the danger the Soviet Union faced in either direction. To be sure, Dulles distinguished between the use of force to put down the riots, and 'Stalinist' repression that could follow. But in discussing this eventuality they acknowledged that the Soviet leaders themselves were not operating as Stalinists.

The CIA at times doubted the link between destalinisation and Poznan.²² Yet it is hard to imagine the riots happening without the emphasis the 20th Party Congress gave to the doctrine of national roads to socialism. Furthermore, the protesters were certainly aware of the liberal image that Khrushchev and Bulganin were attempting to cultivate, as well as the recent release from prison and reinstatement of Wladyslav Gomulka, a reformist, to the Polish Workers Party. Indeed, the NSC noted the common developments in each satellite since Stalin's death: reduced role of secret police, attacks on the cult of personality, and an emphasis on socialist legality. Along with different roads to socialism and the denigration of Stalin, the NSC thought these were the motivations behind the

¹⁹ "OCB Minutes," July 3, 1956, RG59, ExSec, ACF, 1953-61, Box 2, (untitled), NARA.

²⁰ "Memo to Beam," July 3, 1956, RG59, BEA, Office files of AsstSecState For Euro Affairs 1943-57, Box 29, OCB Committee on Soviet Problems III, NARA.

²¹ MemCon: Eisenhower and Dulles, July 13, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 127-128 Emphasis added.

²² CIA/SRS-2. *Ibid.*, 128-136.

developments in the satellites. The attack on Stalin introduced a significant degree of fallibility to the Soviet leaders, which in combination with the reduced power of the police and nationalism, led to greater demands for reform in the satellites.²³

Bohlen agreed with the NSC, but not with the CIA. He thought Poznan was a product of the post-Stalin relaxation. Bohlen found it easy to understand the outpourings of dissent in the satellites, where police power was curbed but no real redress for grievances given. Bohlen thought the best thing for the U.S. would be to stimulate continued relaxation.²⁴ In this scenario, continued U.S. pressure could easily be counterproductive.

Sentiments such as Bohlen's would prove difficult for high-level policymakers, such as Eisenhower, Dulles and others on the NSC, to reconcile with other considerations. Allies took various views on Poznan and the concurrent changes in the Soviet bloc, varying from Adenauer's dismissal to Pineau's optimism. The British meanwhile remained guarded, but more open to a Soviet thaw than the U.S. While in the U.S., a study of public opinion on the Soviet 'new line' found that Poznan caused many to reject the apparent Soviet changes as false.²⁵ *Time* correspondents were quick to characterise the Soviet response to Poznan as Stalinist and to insist, contrary to even the administration's acknowledgement, that there was no reduction in police power prior to the riots. The claim that Stalinist secret police methods were still in force was all the more extraordinary since *Time* also claimed that due to existing grievances, further outbreaks of violence were likely.²⁶ It is hard to see how more unrest would have been forthcoming in the face of Stalinist-style repression. Harrison Salisbury provided an answer to the question of why the Soviet leaders would embark on such a risky course in the satellites: it was much the same as his reasoning for destalinisation inside the USSR. Salisbury thought destalinisation was meant to relieve economic and political pressure on the Soviet system. The only other means of release, he argued, were war or revolution. But trying to let out a small amount of pressure could be more dangerous than trying to "keep the lid

²³ Draft Statement of Policy by the NSC on U.S. Policy toward the Soviet Satellites...", July 3, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25*, 191-194 This formed the basis of NSC-5608.

²⁴ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.115," July 16, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

²⁵ "Survey No.182."

²⁶ "'Poland', Beal to Boyle," July 5, 1956, TCD, Box 3, Folder 43, HL.

on". Indeed, brief periods of relaxation in the post-Stalin years previously led to unrest in the GDR, Czechoslovakia, and Tiflis.²⁷ Such varying opinion among allies and the press provided no clear indication of how to interpret the unrest in the satellites within the larger context of destalinisation.

Destalinisation and Changing U.S. Objectives towards the Soviet Bloc

The fate of Eastern Europe concerned the administration even before it took office. But the Solarium exercise made it abundantly clear that little could be done to change the Soviet position in the satellites without risking war.²⁸ As such, the objectives changed to reflect this. In December 1953, NSC-174 outlined the dangers involved in trying to detach a satellite. It argued that nationalism could be a powerful tool in reducing how effective the satellites could be as allies of the USSR, but not something that could effectively break down the bloc. NSC-174 also assumed Titoism to be an important element in a strategy to reduce satellite-Soviet solidarity. But the overall objectives stated in NSC-174 remained both far reaching: "...the rights of the people in the Soviet satellites to enjoy governments of their own choosing", and more immediate and practical: "[t]o disrupt the Soviet-satellite relationship, minimize satellite contributions to Soviet power...[and] to undermine satellite regimes."²⁹

NSC-5501 looked at the Soviet threat more generally but also addressed the satellites insofar as the U.S. should exploit the differences between the Kremlin and satellite regimes in order to promote actions on the part of the Soviet bloc that would, at the very least, not conflict with U.S. interests.³⁰ In order words, the administration sought to promote evolutionary change to the benefit of the U.S.

The Soviet Vulnerabilities Project led by Max Millikan and Walt Rostow at CENIS prompted NSC-5505, the drafting of which overlapped with NSC-5501. The project's report concluded that the U.S. should strive to "...promote evolutionary changes internally in the Soviet Bloc" as well as:

...changes in Russian society [that] will tend, if only in the long run, to

²⁷ "Despatch: 'Sunday for Desmond', H. Salisbury."

²⁸ A good history of the Solarium exercise is: Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, chapter 8; Another is: Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind*, 123-129.

²⁹ NSC 174, *FRUS: 1952-1954 Vol. 8*, 110-125.

³⁰ NSC 5501, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 19*, 24-39.

reduce or remove the latent threat posed by that society to our way of life. These changes might occur by violent crisis and revolution or by gradual evolution.³¹

NSC-5505 stated that the U.S. should:

Seek to create and increase popular and bureaucratic pressures on the Soviet regime through the exploitation of discontents and other problems to promote evolutionary changes in Soviet policies and conduct...

Therefore, the U.S. should seek:

...to cause the regime to occupy itself increasingly with internal problems, ...[and] [c]ontinue basic [U.S.] opposition to the Soviet system and continue to state its evils; *but stress evolutionary rather than revolutionary change.*³²

A progress report on NSC-5505 in January 1956 repeated these passages practically verbatim:

...the promotion of revolutionary changes appears to be beyond our national capabilities, the promotion of evolutionary changes appears to offer the most acceptable course for the U.S....³³

Both the NSC and the White House were aware that change in the Soviet system could be so slow that it might be difficult to detect. This raises the question that if the administration expected change to be gradual, why were so many small changes in the Soviet system and behaviour after Stalin's death so easily discounted? Why were they not studied further to see if they were indeed the types of changes that the report warned of? Even more interesting was the NSC's conclusion that in pursuing this goal the U.S. should convince the USSR that their national security was not threatened.³⁴ After the Geneva Summit and the failure of disarmament talks it is hard to see what the U.S. did to convince the Soviets of this. Indeed, the rhetoric of the administration in an election year would have militated against such reassurance if even it were to be given. Furthermore, not until some weeks after the 20th Party Congress did anyone in Washington seriously contemplate the veracity of the changes wrought by destalinisation. Such changes were certainly not subtle, and they would have fit with the idea of the promotion of evolutionary change as outlined so far.

³¹ Cutler to Eisenhower, "Report on the Exploitation of Soviet Vulnerabilities," November 30, 1954, WHO-SANSA, NSCS, Policy Paper Subseries, Box 14, NSC 5505/1-Exploitation of Soviet...(2), DDEL.

³² NSC-5505, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 24*, 20-22. Emphasis added.

³³ "Progress Report on NSC 5505/1."

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Superseding NSC-174 in July 1956, NSC-5608 emphasised that Soviet control in the satellites was secure. But it acknowledged that the current events in the satellites were a reflection of destalinisation, Titoism was once again noted as an important source of friction in the bloc. The NSC recognised these developments meant the ability of the U.S. to sow disunity were improved.³⁵ But NSC-5608 recommended little in terms of how to harness destalinisation to benefit the U.S.

Destalinisation's Bitter Fruit: October-November 1956

Gomulka's re-emergence as leader of the PWP was representative of both nationalism and anti-Soviet sentiment. Evidence from the period indicates that the administration understood the effects of destalinisation in Hungary in the same manner. Policymakers saw differences between the satellites insofar as nationalism was a factor, but Soviet Communism provided a paradigm with which to interpret and compartmentalise the twin crises of Poland and Hungary in October-November 1956. The crises were always spoken of in a manner that illustrated that the high-level members of the administration grasped that they were not separate. Indeed, Poland and Hungary were almost always spoken of in the same breath. Therefore, they are discussed in the same manner.

There were, however, differing interpretations of destalinisation's repercussions. From the outset the PPS and OIR were aware that destalinisation formed the basis of the crisis not only in Poland, but also underpinned the current tension with Moscow. Indeed, the OIR's analysis emphasised that Gomulka was taking actions that were specifically anti-Stalinist in character, such as de-emphasising collectivisation. He publicly denounced the effects of the cult of personality, saying it created a "hierarchical ladder" that extended from Moscow through the satellites. OIR saw specific importance in the last point, since the Kremlin never viewed Soviet control of Eastern Europe as one of Stalin's mistakes.³⁶

Allen Dulles understood the close relationship between Poland and Hungary. He told the NSC that the worsening crisis in Hungary threatened the

³⁵ NSC-5608, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25*, 216-221.

³⁶ "IR-7364: Polish Communist Regime Asserts Independent Course," October 24, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 109, Poland, NARA.

newly stabilised situation in Poland. The Soviets could well go back on their word if they felt that Gomulka could not be trusted, or if the deal reached with the Poles was likely to instigate demands elsewhere. Dulles noted Gomulka's speech about the Soviet economic system, which he deemed -overstatement unintended- as "the most violent denunciation of the entire Soviet economic system which had ever been issued anywhere from any source." He realised, however, that there were important differences between the two situations. Gomulka presented clear but not drastic aims, while the situation in Hungary lacked leadership. Dulles noted that it was quickly coming to represent a stark choice for both Hungarians and Moscow. Either the Soviets would need to resort to "Stalinist control", or permit reforms toward democracy that could lead to a total loss of authority. Harold Stassen seconded Dulles. Stassen claimed that the Soviets would have to "revert to the old harsh policy of Stalin toward the satellites, or else they would have to let things go on as they were going", which would lead to a loss of Hungary. Eisenhower agreed, noting that if the Soviets reverted to "the Stalin policies, then they would stand bankrupt before the whole world."³⁷

The administration knew that Hungarian Socialist Workers Party leader Mátyás Rakosi was an increasing target of attack as a result of destalinisation. The U.S. legation in Budapest suggested that the U.S. should launch a propaganda effort to make Rakosi's position even more difficult for Moscow to support.³⁸ Allen Dulles highlighted to the NSC the danger that destalinisation was posing for the Soviet position in Hungary: there was considerable unrest, but the U.S. was distracted by Poznan. The Central Committee Degree of 30 June was clearly meant to put an end to any discussion and restore order among communist cadres before further unrest could erupt. Of course, Dulles thought the U.S. should see to it that the debate about Stalin continued. He recommended publishing all information the U.S. had about Khrushchev's speech and its implications for Hungary.³⁹ The administration was aware of the effect that destalinisation was having, and sought to capitalise on Soviet troubles. It indicated an understanding of the overt changes resulting from Stalin's denouncement.

³⁷ "Memo: 301st NSC Meeting," October 26, 1956, AWF, NSCS, Box 8, DDEL.

³⁸ Telegram From the Legation in Hungary to StateDept, April 12, 1956. *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25*, 147-148.

³⁹ "Memo: 290th NSC Meeting," July 12, 1956, AWF, NSCS, Box 8, DDEL.

As summer progressed the administration became increasingly concerned with the effects of destalinisation. Soon after the crisis in Poland and the unrest in Hungary began in earnest, U.S. policy toward the satellites officially changed. Now the objective would be the emergence of national communist movements in each satellite.⁴⁰ The NSC grasped, if belatedly, the importance of the ideological revisions that were made after Stalin's death and codified at the 20th Party Congress. Indeed, if the NSC were swifter perhaps more could have been done to stoke the flames of nationalism in the bloc. As it was, it took until 26 October, and the crises in Hungary and Poland, to prompt changes to the national security strategy. Such changes were not approved until 31 October. Destalinisation was the cause that prompted the change in objective. The administration could hardly claim to have had any influence on events in Poland or Hungary. Yet the NSC framed it thusly:

Developments in Poland appear favorable to the early attainment of this objective. The Gomulka government has proclaimed its "national independence and equality" and has asserted its right to pursue its own internal road to "socialism"...In Hungary, a nationalist movement, similar to that in Poland, was triggered into national revolt by the intervention of Soviet troops called in by the Hungarian government in the first hours of its difficulty. The demands of the people on the government have since gone far beyond those originally sought and are now anti-communist as well as anti-Soviet.⁴¹

Indeed, if not for the secrecy of the NSC debates over destalinisation one could have concluded that the changed objective was a way for the administration to claim a foreign policy success. It was a clear case of moving the goal posts, especially as the NSC made clear in its conclusions that there was little the U.S. could actually do to influence events.⁴²

The stated objective of promoting evolutionary change in the Soviet bloc was progressing, albeit not through any efforts of the U.S. The NSC acknowledged destalinisation as the driving force. Poland had claimed "mutual independence and equality" while maintaining its loyalty to Moscow. In this instance, rather than seeing continued fealty to Moscow as something that made

⁴⁰ Richard Davis, "Developments in Poland and Hungary: U.S. Policy and Courses of Action in the Light Thereof," October 28, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 113, S/P Working Papers, Oct 1956, NARA This paper would become NSC 5616.

⁴¹ NSC-5616, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25, 354-358*; Richard Davis, "Developments in Poland and Hungary..."

⁴² NSC-5616, *FRUS: 1955-1957, Vol. 25, 354-358*.

Poland's changed line inconsequential, the NSC recognised the importance. The U.S. should maintain the course set by NSC-5608/1 by emphasising its willingness to discuss all issues with the Kremlin. It should also be careful not to appear too willing to offer assistance to Gomulka, lest this taint him by association. But the situation in Hungary was more difficult. The frequent changes in leadership and open defiance of communist authority prevented stabilisation. U.S. intervention was out of the question. Rather, the U.S. needed to encourage cautious liberalisation that would discourage Soviet intervention.⁴³

But as the reality of Soviet intervention in Hungary became clear, the path Poland took towards national communism was in doubt. Whereas the Poles made it clear that they would remain allied with Moscow, the Hungarian uprising took on an explicitly anti-Soviet tone. Allen Dulles thought that Gomulka could be removed by the Soviets due to the bloodshed in Hungary.⁴⁴ All the U.S. could do was reassure the Soviets that the U.S. had no designs on Hungary. Foster Dulles did so, but to no effect.⁴⁵

The crushing of the uprising had a predictable effect in the media. Those commentators who never gave credence to destalinisation pointed to the Soviet use of violence as proof of the continued reality of Stalinism and the fact that Soviet reforms were purely for show. Some contended that Hungary could actually be a turning point in Soviet policy abroad, and others thought Hungary could be a harbinger of the collapse of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe. For those that thought of Hungary as such a pivotal moment the wisest move would be for the U.S. to 'nourish' independence movements behind the Iron Curtain. Of course, commentators provided little detail on what this entailed. More realist commentators supported Eisenhower's and Dulles' refusal to involve the U.S.⁴⁶

⁴³ NSC-5616, *ibid.*, 354–358.

⁴⁴ "Dictated Notes for NSC Meeting, A Dulles," October 26, 1956, CREST, CIA-RDP79R00890A000700100028-9, NARA.

⁴⁵ "TeleCon: JFD to Stassen," October 31, 1956, DDEL, JFDP, Memo. of Tel. Conv. General Oct 1, 1956-Dec 29, 1956 (2), DDEL.

⁴⁶ "Daily Opinion Summary," October 26, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2820-2948, Jul-Dec 1956, 2, NARA; "Daily Opinion Summary," October 30, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2820-2948, Jul-Dec 1956, 2, NARA; "Monthly Survey of American Opinion No.186," November 2, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 12, Monthly Survey 1956, 2, NARA.

Walter Lippmann thought the tragedy of Hungary was that it tried to bypass Titoism.⁴⁷

The Aftermath of the Hungarian Uprising

The impact of the Hungarian Uprising on the satellites in general was closely scrutinised. The OIR provided the PPS with a detailed report in the drafting of NIE 12-57. The report concluded that destalinisation significantly increased the strain on the satellite system. But outside Poland there was little progress in altering the relationship with Moscow. Soviet troops were up to the task of keeping order and the only change was that the commitment to violence of local forces might have been lessened by destalinisation. This small change notwithstanding, OIR's conclusion was not very optimistic:

The Soviet European satellite system has been subjected during the past year to greater stresses than at any previous time, largely due to the repercussions of Soviet de-Stalinization at the 20th CPSU Congress...A prime result has been the highlighting of Moscow's determination and capability to hold fast to the Eastern European area, by military force if need be, and to maintain Communist governments in alliance with the USSR throughout the regions.⁴⁸

To be sure, the OIR did note the perverse result of destalinisation in the satellites: It opened up new avenues to national interpretations of communism- for a period- but the Soviets subsequently made clear that no satellite would leave the communist fold.

The tendencies encouraged by destalinisation were present throughout the Soviet bloc. Only in Poland and Hungary did they burst into the open. The crushing of the Hungarian revolt quashed any enthusiasm for independence from Moscow in the rest of the satellites. Yet the OIR saw Poland as the bright spot in the situation. If Gomulka could hold on to his gains, then this could over time encourage further independence from Moscow in other satellites.⁴⁹ Russia experts

⁴⁷ "Survey No.186"; *ibid.*; "Daily Opinion Summary," October 31, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2820-2948, Jul-Dec 1956, 2, NARA; "Daily Opinion Summary," November 6, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 8, DPOPF, Nos. 2820-2948, Jul-Dec 1956, 2, NARA; "Monthly Survey of American Opinion No.187," December 3, 1956, RG59, OPOS, Box 12, Monthly Survey 1956, 2, NARA.

⁴⁸ "IB-7407, 'Stability and Cohesion of the Soviet Satellite Structure,'" December 21, 1956, RG59, PPS Subject Files 1954-62, Box 108, Europe (East), NARA; Also in: "OIR Contribution to NIE 12-57, 'Stability and Cohesion of the Soviet Satellite Structure,'" December 14, 1956, RG59, BEA, OSA, Bilateral Relations 150/70/35 Box 15, 1955-1958, NARA.

⁴⁹ "IB-7407."

outside the administration, such as Kennan, supported the OIR's conclusions.⁵⁰ Of course, such independence from Moscow was a result not only of the decentralising tendencies of destalinisation unleashed at the 20th Party Congress. It was also a consequence of the broader destalinisation campaign since Stalin's death. Allen Dulles stressed that the current debates about the nature of communism in Moscow, Belgrade, Beijing and Warsaw were all a direct result of the lack of a "clear communist gospel"⁵¹ that had developed since 1953.

But destalinisation's effects did not only flow outward from Moscow. The situation in the satellites also impacted the progression of destalinisation in the USSR itself. Since 1953 the Kremlin had embarked on differing forms of liberalisation. The progression was not always smooth, and at times regressive. This led the administration to often conclude that Stalinism would yet return, and through the Geneva Summit there remained a nagging inclination to dismiss destalinisation. Not everyone took this view, especially not Bohlen. He noted at various points the ongoing changes and repeatedly suggested alterations to U.S. perceptions of destalinisation in order to better assess the U.S. position light of these changes. He did so again after the Hungarian uprising in an effort to shed light on how the satellites might have changed the situation in the USSR. He concluded that there had been little effect. At first he was concerned about student unrest, which led to public questioning of the regime.⁵² These outbursts soon subsided and Bohlen concluded that the regime was secure. The military remained committed to the supremacy of the Party. But critically there was no reversal to any of the policies announced at the 20th Party Congress despite the unrest in the satellites and in the USSR. Bohlen realised destalinisation was still in force. To be sure, there was a crackdown on excessive criticism of the Party, but there was still room for discussion, and this was worlds away from life under Stalin. Purges were now a thing of the past. Indeed, Bohlen thought the discontent

⁵⁰ "Meeting Digest: George F. Kennan, 'Problems of U.S. Foreign Policy,'" January 3, 1957, CFR, Box 447, Folder 6, ML.

⁵¹ "Memo: 308th NSC Meeting," January 3, 1957, AWF, NSCS, Box 8, DDEL.

⁵² "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1330," November 28, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

of the intelligentsia could even lead to further concessions to some segments of society.⁵³

Chapter Conclusion

In the months after the 20th Party Congress the U.S. paid close heed to the developments of destalinisation in the satellites. The initial conclusion was that they did little to change the reality of Soviet control. This understanding persisted through the riots in Poznan. Even after Polish October many clung to the belief that the Soviets were merely allowing the Poles the semblance of independence, and that the reality of Soviet domination would soon enough reappear. Behind all of this was the persistent perception of the Soviets as cunning and conspiratorial. The State Department and CIA tended to give the Kremlin too much credit; they often concluded that if things did not appear to be going well for the Soviets, this must be part of the plan. But it was Dulles with his reformed view of the Soviet leaders who thought that the Soviet leaders were not out to hoodwink the West by letting the satellites have a degree of independence, or at least some reforms.

But the Hungarian uprising made the reality of destalinisation abundantly clear. It was undeniable that it even if it were part of a Soviet tactic to undermine the West, as the more paranoid doubters persisted in believing, it nonetheless was an important issue that the administration needed to address. Yet there is no evidence that the events in the satellites changed perceptions of the Soviets from what they were just prior to the events in Poland and Hungary. It would have been understandable if Dulles and Eisenhower had changed their minds and rejected the Soviet changes since the Secret Speech, and more broadly since 1953, as hollow due to the crushing of Hungarian resistance. But this did not happen. It was, to paraphrase from Arthur Conan Doyle, a situation where the dog did not bark. At the same time, those who never changed their perceptions of Soviet Communism as a result of destalinisation found their reticence vindicated.

There is a lack of evidence in this period on this issue. Between the uprising and the end of 1956 there is no evidence of any re-evaluation of this changed perception of the Soviets that Eisenhower, Dulles and others held. Some of this is due to the fact that at this time Dulles underwent an operation for the

⁵³ "Cable: Bohlen to SecState, No.1368," December 3, 1956, RG59, CDF, 761.00, 1955-59, C0016, Reel 5, NARA.

stomach cancer that would later kill him. The absence of evidence does not tell us one way or the other, but it is reasonable to conclude that there were numerous conversations of how the uprising affected U.S. perceptions of the Soviets. These conversations were either informal or were not recorded. However, the progression of U.S.-Soviet relations proceeded in the years following the uprising suggests that Eisenhower and Dulles did not revert to an understanding of the Kremlin as beholden to Stalinist thought. They certainly were not viewing the Soviets in the same manner as they had in 1953. Both domestic and alliance politics had changed, and therefore this was an easier position to defend. But crucially, Soviet actions both inside the USSR, and in the satellites helped confirm to the Eisenhower administration that the Soviets, despite the crushing of the Hungarian revolt, were acting out of self-preservation rather than reverting 'to type'. Indeed, the very fact that the Soviets were undertaking destalinisation at all finally sank in. Eisenhower and Dulles realised that the Soviet hand was forced in Hungary. To them the hesitancy of the Soviet intervention was proof of the Soviet reticence to use force. For Eisenhower and Dulles this confirmed their belief that the Soviet leaders were distancing themselves from Stalinist methods. The Stalin they conceived of, or his lackeys, would not have hesitated to crush the uprising in Hungary, nor would he have tolerated Polish intransigence. Indeed, they knew that under Stalin the situation would not have occurred at all. They had fully come to accept the reality of destalinisation.

Just as the Soviet leaders were hesitant, Eisenhower was extremely cautious, almost to the point of giving the Soviet intervention the benefit of the doubt.⁵⁴ There was little need to do this. He could have issued stronger messages of support but chose not to. U.S. rhetoric was measured. This was partially due to the ongoing crisis in Suez. Eisenhower realised the limitations on action, but could had made Hungary a much larger issue. This belied a different understanding of Soviet intentions than during the 1953 riots in East Germany and other satellites, when U.S. rhetoric was stridently anti-Soviet and sought to capitalise on the events for the sake of U.S. propaganda. This time U.S. action was

⁵⁴ Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 422-423; Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, 116.

limited to an attempt at a UN resolution, which it expected the Soviets would veto, and accepting Hungarian refugees.⁵⁵

It was clear to Eisenhower and Dulles that the Soviets were forced to act in order to preserve the Warsaw Pact. They separated this need for action from destalinisation and the changes in the USSR since 1953. For Eisenhower and Dulles, the fact that destalinisation was proceeding despite the uprising was proof of destalinisation as something much more than a tactic. The reforms in Poland remained and the anti-Stalin campaign in the USSR continued. This led Eisenhower and Dulles to conclude that the Soviets acted out of simple self-preservation rather than any sort of ideological reversion to Stalinism. Indeed, Hungary and Poland led to a solidification of the status quo in Eastern Europe that was useful to both the U.S. and the USSR. This acceptance of Soviet domination has not been highlighted before, at least not in this time frame. It is credited as one of the items that the U.S. needed to recognise in order for détente to take hold in the 1960s, and would later be formalised in the Helsinki Accords. But the roots of the U.S. acceptance of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe was in reality closely bound up with American acceptance of destalinisation and the effects of the 20th Party Congress.

⁵⁵ Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, 430, 433; Ambrose, *Eisenhower, Vol. 2: The President, 1952-1969*, 355–56, 360–61, 367, 371–73; An overview of Hungary and Poland from the Soviet perspective can be found in: Taubman, *Khrushchev*, 294–299; Fursenko and Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War*, chap. 5.

Conclusion

The immediate period after Stalin's death witnessed the genesis of destalinisation. Scholars have not ignored this era. But the conspicuous feature of this literature is its exclusive focus on 1953. The most prominent studies of how Stalin's death affected the West, such as Larres and Osgood's excellent volume, do not look past the initial period of transition of power in the Kremlin.¹ At most, the contributors examine the period up to the Geneva Conference.

As my thesis has shown, it is vitally important to trace how Washington perceived the origins of destalinisation, and its radical expansion at the 20th Party Congress. As early as 1953 many officials understood the link between Stalin's death and what would develop into destalinisation. Yet historians have failed to examine Stalin's death in combination with destalinisation. This is a serious gap in the existing scholarship.² Other works reconsider the period after Stalin's death as a chance to end the Cold War, but do not assess the period after 1955.³

This thesis addresses such shortcomings. It shows that when examined with a longer view, the role of destalinisation in changing U.S. perceptions of the USSR becomes much clearer. Such an examination matters since so much Cold War history has been based on an assumption of unrelenting U.S. hostility towards the Soviets from the onset of the Cold War until the beginnings of détente in the 1960s. While there was certainly a baseline level of hostility and mistrust throughout the Cold War, this varied according to time and circumstance. The period under examination is of critical importance since it shows the genesis of the transition from total mistrust and rejection of anything Soviet towards a more moderate perception of the Soviet system that was ultimately compatible with détente. Some in Washington began to express a more accepting view of destalinisation in late 1955, but this only became the view of Eisenhower and Dulles after the 20th Party Congress. Without the challenge to the American mindset that destalinisation presented, culminating with the shock of the Secret Speech, U.S. leaders undoubtedly would have taken years longer to

¹ Larres and Osgood, *Cold War After Stalin's Death*.

² Many of the works addressed in the introduction do mention destalinisation, but only in passing or in the context of other issues. It is not addressed comprehensively in its own right.

³ NSC-5505 is not mentioned. Stanke, "Stalin's Death and Anglo-American Visions of Ending the Cold War, 1953."

accept that Stalinism was no longer the Kremlin's ruling idea. Because of the Secret Speech, Washington was able to develop a more nuanced view of Soviet actions and intentions, which in turn allowed the second Eisenhower administration to improve relations with the USSR. This set the foundations for the *détente* that followed in the 1960s.

Domestic and Foreign Factors

Although the Cold War would continue for almost another 40 years, the changes that began in 1953 would have profound implications for the tenor of Soviet-American relations. Stalin's death not only allowed the Soviet leaders to pursue different avenues towards their objectives, but it also led to far-reaching changes that would have serious implications in Washington.

The Eisenhower administration started to reassess its perceptions of Soviet Communism in this period. This reassessment led to its changed view of the tactics and behaviour of the Soviet leaders. But improved relations relied on viewing Soviet Communism in a different light. The well-known *détente* of the 1960s and 1970s necessitated a new understanding of the Soviets and their intentions. If the Soviet leaders had still been regarded as Stalinists, little improvement in relations would have been forthcoming. It is hard to imagine an *ushanka*-clad Gerald Ford bear-hugging Brezhnev in Vladivostok, or even Nixon debating with Khrushchev at the Moscow World's Fair if the Soviet leadership had still been regarded as unceasingly hostile.

Because relations with the USSR were so tense in the 1950s, historians have largely overlooked this period when exploring whether Washington could have developed a new understanding. As this thesis has shown, however, this is exactly when such a re-evaluation began. The first Eisenhower administration was pivotal in this regard. Many of the officials involved were extremely resistant to the idea that the Soviet leaders could change, or that Soviet Communism would ever be anything but aggressive and expansionist at the expense of the U.S. Yet some of these same officials, including most crucially Dulles, would also come to accept a different view of the Soviets by the end of 1956.

Dulles was perhaps the most resistant to the idea of change in the Kremlin up to the end of 1955, and it was not just his rigid mindset that was responsible. Domestic political opinion and alliance politics were important, to an extent. In

1953-54 the power of the Republican right made it extremely dangerous for officials to challenge the accepted image of the Soviets as expansionist Bolsheviks. One only need to look to Dulles' demands for "positive loyalty" or Eisenhower's refusal to stand up for General Marshall during the 1952 presidential campaign to see the Republican right's power.⁴ But by the middle of 1954, this danger had significantly, though not completely, receded. Eisenhower and Dulles were men who had proven their anti-communism, and in Eisenhower at least, their leadership abilities. If anyone could have challenged the accepted view of the Soviets and their methods it was them. Yet the views expressed in the administration about the Soviets and the changes in the USSR remained the same: They were either rejected, or were accepted only with the caveat that they made the Soviets more dangerous. Either way, the Soviets remained communist, so the administration regarded the changes undertaken by the Kremlin as inconsequential.

Until 1955, Washington had another reason to maintain an element of fear in its perception of the Soviets: alliance diplomacy. The Kremlin's own actions were taken in part to make the Soviet Union seem less threatening. Washington regarded this as dangerous to the Western alliance. Prior to the integration of the FRG into NATO in 1955, the State Department was apprehensive about Western European security. This helped prevent a reassessment of the Soviet changes. As one would expect, few in Washington changed their view of the Soviets in this period.

Significantly, though, there is no evidence that either domestic politics or alliance diplomacy proved crucial. Eisenhower and Dulles certainly did not revise their perceptions of the Soviets in the months after McCarthy's implosion in the Army hearings. Nor did they change their views after the FRG was integrated into NATO. To the contrary, heading into the Geneva Summit, Dulles thought no differently of the Soviets than he had in 1953. Clearly their perceptions were deeply engrained—so much so that the easing of domestic anti-communism and the solidifying of NATO did not allay their fears. It was the monumental events of the 20th Party Congress that finally unlocked a new perception of the Soviets.

⁴ Immerman, "Eisenhower and Dulles," 33; Ambrose, *Eisenhower*, chap. 10.

Years of sustained signals of change from the Kremlin after Stalin's death failed to influence the administration. Instead it made most sense to policymakers to fit these new signals into existing perceptions of the Soviets. Washington had heard talk of peace and amicability from the Kremlin in the past, so there was little initially to indicate that something was different now. Work on perceptions has shown that people are more apt to fit new information within existing frameworks of thought if at all possible. Furthermore, from a tactical standpoint, far more can be gained in the short run through deception than honesty.⁵ The U.S. suspected the Soviet leaders of this sort of duplicity.

Thus, in the years after Stalin's death, rather than confront the changes that were occurring in the USSR, the administration continued to rely upon an explanation of the changes as merely tactical and unrepresentative of any wider alteration in Soviet strategy. The U.S. did not know of the internal division the Soviet reversals were causing. The administration, relying on the perception of the Soviets they had cultivated since 1917, concluded that any changes would be readily reversed when it suited the Soviet leaders most. Eisenhower publicly explained this in the closing days of the 1952 election.⁶ Indeed, American officials did not doubt that the Kremlin would soon revert to its violent and deceptive foreign policy – that, after all, had always been the case in the past. Soviet history and ideology had a powerful effect on Dulles' and Eisenhower's conception of how the Soviets operated. They ascribed far too much explanatory power to communist ideology in determining Soviet foreign policy. Yet ironically, when serious alterations to this ideology began to appear, they also dismissed them as irrelevant as long as the Soviets remained communists. The inconsistency was all the more boggling because from 1955 onward encouraging evolutionary change was stated U.S. policy.

U.S. Perceptions of Stalinism and the Soviet System

Key officials had good reasons for the image of the Soviets that they held in the first years after Stalin's death. From the American perspective Soviet Communism had long been an enemy of the liberal capitalist society. The

⁵ Larson, *Mistrust*, 13.

⁶ Benson Lee Grayson, *The American Image of Russia, 1917-1977* (New York: Ungar, 1978), 211-214.

antipathy began with the October Revolution and the subsequent Russian separate peace with Germany. Thus from the start the relationship between the West and the new Soviet state was, from the Western perspective, based on betrayal. Indeed, this was part of a larger image of the Bolsheviks as cunning, conspiratorial, and violent. The Cold War did not begin in 1917, but its foundations can most certainly be found there, as the memoirs of Kennan, Bohlen and others attest.⁷ The experiences of these men had a great impact on how they viewed the Soviet Union. Indeed, this was the heyday of the study of totalitarianism, and such thinking meshed well with the mindset that Eisenhower, Dulles and others held as the Cold War began. At the same time, a small industry was created around the study of the Soviet Union.⁸

In the post-war period the fundamental disagreement of the U.S. and USSR was laid bare. Soviet actions in Eastern Europe after the German defeat were understood through the perceptions of the Soviets as Bolsheviks who sought to conquer the world. Soviet domination of Eastern Europe meant that the menace of Bolshevism that existed in the 1920s-30s was now a very real threat. The Soviet state was thought to espouse everything antithetical to an American way of life: elimination of private property, the destruction of individual freedoms, atheism, and even slavery. Many in the Truman administration cultivated this Manichean image to justify various actions.⁹ But the prevalence and depth of this perception cannot be attributed merely to such cynicism. The image of the Soviets was one of ideologically driven zealots who were now frighteningly powerful. Of course the men who made the decisions in the Truman and later the Eisenhower

⁷ Kennan, *Memoirs: 1950-1963*.; George F. Kennan, *Russia and the West Under Lenin and Stalin* (London: Hutchinson, 1961); Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*; Loy W. Henderson and George W. Baer, *A Question of Trust: The Origins of U.S.-Soviet Diplomatic Relations* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1986), pt. 3-8; Foglesong, *America's Secret War Against Bolshevism*, chap. 2.

⁸ Engerman, *Know Your Enemy*; Peter G. Filene, *American Views of Soviet Russia, 1917-1965*, (Homewood, Ill.: Dorsey Press, 1968); Brands, *Cold Warriors*; De Santis, *The Diplomacy of Silence*; Selverstone, *Constructing the Monolith*; Arendt, *The Burden of Our Time*; *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1966); Geroid Tanquary Robinson, "The Ideological Combat," *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics* 21, no. 1 (1950): 90-104; A good anthology of the feelings toward the USSR by public figures is: Grayson, *The American Image of Russia, 1917-1977*.

⁹ See in particular: Melvyn Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration, and the Cold War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992); Michael J. Hogan, *A Cross of Iron: Harry S. Truman and the Origins of the National Security State, 1945-1954* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998).

administrations were no less ideological themselves.¹⁰ It was merely their perspective that differed. To them, liberal capitalism was the norm, and communism was the ideological aberration. Thus many looked to the study of Soviet ideology in order to understand the actions of those in the Kremlin. There was, as is often the case in rivalries, a severe lack of introspection. Until the rise of the New Left in the 1960s few questioned what the U.S. role was in the hostilities. Thus, history was vitally important in moulding the view of the Soviets held at the beginning of the Eisenhower administration.¹¹ In this situation the historical perception that numerous policymakers formed of the Soviets played a role in how they responded to developments in the USSR. In the absence of good intelligence about the intentions of the new Soviet leaders the inclination of those in the Eisenhower administration was to fit changes into the perception they had formed not only in the post-war period, but since 1917. This represented a significant barrier to the formation of a new understanding of the Soviets.

Initial Challenges to Perceptions, 1953-54

The Soviet leaders changed both their policies and their manner of interaction with the West after Stalin's death. Yet due to how U.S.-Soviet relations had progressed since the Second World War, policymakers in Washington dismissed these changes out of hand. They viewed efforts to improve relations as false: mere ways to trick the West into a false sense of security. Indeed, the USSR did have a dual purpose in initiating change in the opening phases of destalinisation. Its peace offensive was a case in point. The Soviets truly desired

¹⁰ The topic of ideology and the Cold War has been studied in depth. In addition to the works mentioned in the preceding footnotes, see: Anders Stephanson, "Liberty or Death: The Cold War as US Ideology," in *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, and Theory* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 81-100; *Manifest Destiny: American Expansion and the Empire of Right* (Hill and Wang, 1996); Campbell Craig and Fredrik Logevall, *America's Cold War: The Politics of Insecurity* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2009); David Engerman, "Ideology and the Origins of the Cold War, 1917-1962," in *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, ed. Melvyn Leffler and Odd Arne Westad, vol. I (Cambridge: CUP, 2010); The role of religion since the founding of the American republic played a key role, see: Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*.

¹¹ This has been well examined, most notably by Daniel Yergin and the "Yalta and Riga axioms". He relies heavily on how the interaction of history and certain personalities. *Shattered Peace*; Yergin is not alone, see also: De Santis, *The Diplomacy of Silence*; Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas, *The Wise Men: Six Friends and the World They Made* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986); Martin Weil, *A Pretty Good Club: The Founding Fathers of the U.S. Foreign Service* (New York: Norton, 1978) Weil discusses the founding of the Foreign Service back to the early days of the Republic with an eye on the formative years of the Service in the 1920s through the end of the Second World War.

peace. A war with the West would be devastating for the USSR. Yet Kremlin leaders also saw the peace offensive as a wedge to divide Western allies. Because the U.S. interpreted the latter objective as perfidious, the overall Soviet desire for peace was assumed to be as well. As a result, the administration remained convinced of Soviet hostility. This was the beginning of a tendency in the administration to dismiss any change in the Kremlin because they viewed a select few Soviet actions through the established lens of the Soviets as conspiratorial and dishonest. Indeed, the overwhelming position was that the change in Soviet attitude was simply tactical. Bohlen was the only exception to this when he stressed that a much more fundamental shift in the Kremlin was beginning. Although he expressed this in numerous cables to Dulles and others, he was not taken seriously. At this point it still made sense to the majority, not to mention the most influential, in the administration to explain the Soviet shifts in terms of tactical moves. There was not yet a long-term history of sustained change on the part of the Soviets that could sway doubters.

Popular opinion was an important consideration in this period. There was little to gain and much to lose by appearing conciliatory towards the Soviets. Numerous voices in Congress, not least of which was McCarthy, waited to jump on any indication of softness towards communism. Thus any motivation within the administration to challenge perceptions or policy towards the Soviets was seriously undermined, and the freedom of action of Eisenhower and Dulles constrained.

Furthermore, the lack of intelligence about the Soviet leadership meant that it was dangerous for the administration to plan for anything but the worst-case scenario. Even if there had been the political will to investigate the Soviet changes more closely the administration was constantly grasping at straws when assessing who was in charge. This mattered since the Soviet leadership was the best indication of the direction Soviet policy would take.

After Beria's execution and throughout 1954 the administration spent a great deal of time and effort trying to discern whether there was a power struggle in the Kremlin in order to try and ascertain what direction Soviet policy would take. Therefore, Malenkov's effort to expand light industry was particularly scrutinised. However, perceptions of Soviet intentions remained such that even

serious changes in economic policy were disregarded as indications of lasting change. The shifts in economic priorities were thought to be temporary and could be reversed when it suited the Soviets or were the result of an expanding Soviet economy that could provide both guns *and* butter. In this regard, the best-case scenario was that the Soviets were duplicitous, and in the worst case they were aggressive. By the end of 1954 the consensus was that the Soviet leaders were fundamentally unreformed and in fact remained Stalinists.

Indications of Change, but Doubt Remains in Force, 1955

Malenkov's downfall led to a great deal of discussion whether there would be a return to Stalinism. Khrushchev's bombastic nature and support for heavy industry seemed to indicate that he would be a hardliner. However, when he persisted with a number of reforms that could not so easily be categorised as 'Stalinist' the administration nevertheless dismissed the possibility that he was taking the USSR in a new direction. Once again, the U.S. understood any changes as actually increasing the danger to the West. Policymakers dismissed reductions in the size of the Soviet military and changes to the planned economy in this way. The administration did not see Soviet actions as an improvement since they were thought to increase the danger posed by Soviet Communism.

Indeed, 1955 was a period when the Soviet leadership stabilised around Khrushchev, and thus the U.S. could be sure whom it was dealing with. Yet the debate over the stability of the collective leadership remained and this had implications for U.S. policy. If the leadership was indeed stable, then the U.S. could proceed with either talking to Khrushchev or countering Soviet moves. If the leadership was unstable, then caution dictated that the U.S. should hold course and continue to express doubt about changed Soviet tactics. The latter interpretation won out.

All this ran parallel to the divisions between different factions in the administration over the fundamental nature of the Soviet leaders. Those like Bohlen, who thought that the collective leadership was firmly in place, believed that ideology was being twisted in the service of policy. He, and others, did not see the Soviet leaders as ideologues, but rather as reasonable men that could be bargained with. Others such as Dulles and the DRS felt that the leaders remained

zealots, and therefore Soviet ideology was a good predictor of future actions. For Dulles and the DRS, it did not matter if the immediate tactics were more peaceful, since they were still being used in service of Soviet Communism. The result of this interpretation was that Dulles and the DRS discarded as false any actions that were ostensibly meant to improve relations since the Soviets remained communist.

Popular opinion, never decisive, now played an even smaller role in these changing perceptions. By 1955 McCarthy was a spent force. Although visceral domestic anti-communism could not be discounted, it was nowhere near as powerful as it had been in the first two years of the administration. Furthermore, the Democratic majorities delivered in the 1954 mid-term elections meant that the power of the isolationist wing of the Republican Party was blunted. Therefore, if Eisenhower and Dulles had sincerely wanted to probe Soviet intentions in 1955 they could have. They had the anti-communist credentials to rebuff any charges of being soft on the Soviets. No one could seriously accuse Eisenhower of being unpatriotic.

At the same time Western European allies were pushing for a meeting with the Soviet leaders. These allied governments faced a popular desire to lessen Cold War tensions. Concurrently, the FRG was integrated into NATO, strengthening Western defences. Despite the popular desire for a meeting and improved Western defence Dulles and the State Department pursued the Geneva summit with half-heartedness. They gave more thought to rebuffing Soviet disarmament proposals and preventing Eisenhower from making agreements that could be 'detrimental' to the U.S. than to achieving lasting agreements.¹² The Soviets were still seen as dishonest and conspiratorial and this prevented meaningful negotiations.

¹² The best overall treatment of the summit is: Bischof and Dockrill, *Cold War Respite*; See also relevant chapters in Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*; Klaus Larres, "The Road to Geneva 1955: Churchill's Summit Diplomacy and Anglo-American Tension After Stalin's Death," in *The Cold War after Stalin's Death: A Missed Opportunity for Peace?* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Richard Immerman, *John Foster Dulles and the Diplomacy of the Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990); Rosenberg, *Soviet-American Relations*, chap. 5-6; On how the administration attempted to prevent Soviet disarmament proposals from gaining traction see: Osgood, *Total Cold War*, 183-216; The Quantico panel thought reduced tensions would be to the detriment of the U.S. "Report of Quantico Vul. Panel."

The 20th Party Congress Changes Perceptions

Prior to the convening of the 20th Party Congress the consensus in the administration was that little would change as a result of it. But it soon became clear that a major shift was underway. Though most often remembered for Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin, this was only one of the reasons that the 20th Party Congress was a major concern for the administration. The U.S. and allied governments paid a great deal of attention to any indications of leadership changes. It soon became clear, however, that although Khrushchev was the most powerful man in the Kremlin, collective leadership was alive and well. The other major event of the Congress was the enshrining into doctrine of several ideological shifts that had taken place since Stalin's death.

From the beginning of the 20th Party Congress Stalin and his legacy were under attack. Both the Moscow embassy and those in the State Department and CIA in Washington watched as the Soviet leaders severely criticised Stalin's cult of personality. Collective leadership was praised at all times. When Khrushchev and the other leaders were not criticising Stalin's policies, they omitted him entirely. The leaders resurrected Lenin to substantiate any points of doctrine. In all of these developments, Washington suspected that Soviet intentions were deceptive. American eyes saw only the dangers. Even when the U.S. learned of Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin this position did not change much in the short term. Various intelligence sources confirmed that the Secret Speech irreversibly destroyed Stalin's memory. But U.S. perceptions of the Soviet leadership and its ideology meant that the reasons for attacking Stalin were doubted. For the Eisenhower administration, destalinisation was inconsequential because the Soviets remained communist. Herein lay the contradiction: those in the administration who thought that ideology was a good indication of the Soviet leaders' intentions also rejected that an alteration of ideology could be the harbinger of change. Foster Dulles was most prominent among these doubters. Others, such as his brother Allen, were not as beholden to the idea of the Soviets as ideologues. He initially rejected destalinisation on the basis that it was merely a

“Trojan corpse”, meant to promise to the Soviet people a better life and to leftists abroad a more attractive form of Soviet Communism.¹³

Khrushchev’s attempt to reform the image and ideology of Soviet Communism threatened the administration. The 20th Party Congress stressed peaceful coexistence, national roads to socialism, the end of the inevitability of war thesis, and announced a ‘third camp’ of neutral nations. These were all things that, on the face of it, the administration could welcome. But the peaceful nature of these revisions was precisely why Washington initially found them so dangerous; the Soviets were altering their ideology to appeal to the neutralists and leftists abroad. The administration thought that convictions mattered little to the Soviets: it was all about increasing the appeal of Soviet Communism. This conformed to the idea of the Soviets as both ideologically driven and opportunistic. Policymakers thought the Soviets remained avowed communist that were willing to temporarily forego ideological purity in order to advance a communist victory. Thus, in a perverse way, the Soviets remained conspiratorial, expansionist, and even Stalinist to the administration.

But in the months following the 20th Party Congress an extremely important change occurred. This gathering provided the shock Eisenhower and Dulles needed to realise that destalinisation was in fact *not* something being done to undermine the West. They accepted that the changes in the USSR since Stalin’s death were not all meant to undermine the West, nor done as tactical manoeuvres. In so doing, their perception of the Soviet leaders changed substantially. Eisenhower and Dulles no longer regarded them as completely distrustful and out for the destruction of the West. To be sure, Dulles still found communism repugnant, and held considerable reservations about Khrushchev and the others in the leadership. However, he came to accept that the Soviet leaders could be dealt with in the same manner that one would with other, non-communist, adversaries. This was the beginning of a serious change of heart, one that would lead to a more open-minded understanding of the Soviets that would be compatible with détente.

¹³ “Speech to Los Angeles World Affairs Council: ‘Purge of Stalinism,’” April 13, 1956, AWDP, Box 105, Folder 1, ML.

Perhaps the most counterintuitive finding of the thesis is that despite the violence of the crushing of the Hungarian Uprising, there is no evidence of Eisenhower or Dulles reversing the modified view of Soviet Communism that they adopted after the 20th Party Congress. It would be logical to conclude that tanks in Budapest would have led to a reversion to the perception of Khrushchev and others as Stalinists. Yet this did not happen. Rather, the hesitant and limited response of the Soviets in Hungary, in combination with the maintenance of the reforms in Poland, led Eisenhower and Dulles to conclude that the Soviets acted out of self-preservation and did not indicate a reversion to Stalinism. Indeed, Hungary and Poland resulted in a solidification of the status quo in Eastern Europe that was useful to both the U.S. and USSR. This brought the U.S. closer to a mindset suitable for détente that had implications for U.S. policy after 1956 in the form of increased diplomatic and cultural exchange and the improvement in relations that continued until the U-2 fiasco scuttled the Paris summit.¹⁴

Dulles realised the importance of the changes in the USSR before many others in the administration. He was certainly ahead of many of his underlings in the State Department. From a hierarchical standpoint, his opinion was the only one other than Eisenhower's that truly mattered in foreign policy making. Nevertheless, it took until the Secret Speech for him to change his perception of the Soviets. Dulles held firm convictions. His universalism meant that any challenge to the ideals of liberal democracy would be fit into an 'us versus them' framework. The Soviet menace could easily be accommodated into such an understanding. In the face of persistent evidence that the Soviet leaders were quite different from Stalin, he steadfastly refused to allow for the possibility of change in the Kremlin until 1956. Yet this does not make Dulles unique- few noticed or believed that the change in the Kremlin was real until after the 20th Party Congress. It was those who did that were the outliers. Therefore, it would be incorrect to assume Dulles rejected the change in the Kremlin due to innate rigidity, as the orthodox view of him would suggest. He was no more rigid in his views than Eisenhower or most of his subordinates. He cannot be singled out for failing to alter his perception of the Soviets sooner. Rather, he can be criticised for failing to be aware of his perceptions or to question his own views. This is most

¹⁴ See, for example: Rosenberg, *Soviet-American Relations*, chap. 8-12.

evident in his conviction that Soviet actions were influenced by Soviet ideology. When intelligence reported that Soviet ideology was actively changing, as soon as 1953, rather than anticipating a Soviet change in course, he rejected the changes as phony and meant to trick the West. Dulles' flaw was not that he was doctrinaire, it was that he was inconsistently so.

Dulles was also a cautious man, and certainly not prone to quick decisions. His caution was based not only on his mistrust of the Soviets, but also his concern over allies and domestic politics. However, he was not overly wary in his thoughts about destalinisation and Soviet leadership change; he came to accept these changes before most of the administration. He can be accused of being politically cautious, often to the point of callousness.¹⁵ But from the historical perspective that he relied on in his understanding of the Soviets this caution was entirely necessary.

Dulles had questioned his perception of Soviet motives since the Geneva Conference. The 20th Party Congress provided the shock he needed to come to a new conclusion about the Soviet leaders. The Soviets were certainly still the enemy, but he came to realise that the threat had substantially changed, and indeed had lessened. To his credit, rather than fit the new information provided by the 20th Party Congress into his existing perception, he fashioned a new one.

This is not meant to imply that Dulles was progressive in his thinking. That label would be better applied to others whose views of the Soviets preceded Dulles' and provided the foundation for his own change in perception. Bohlen was the most prominent among these. He challenged the Washington consensus of the Soviets as early as 1953. His relationship with Dulles, however, prevented his ideas from gaining traction. This was much the same with others who recognised the importance of destalinisation earlier. Dulles' perception of the Soviets was too engrained and required much greater evidence to be altered.

Bohlen's realisation that destalinisation was a serious change in the USSR that needed to be considered in policymaking contrasts with Dulles' reticence. But it also reflects a wider pattern among those who came to advocate a more nuanced view of the changes in the USSR versus those who continued to reject them. As mentioned, Dulles and DRS, believed that Soviet ideology offered not

¹⁵ His treatment of Bohlen, Charles Thayer and Kennan are the most prominent examples of this.

only an explanation of Soviet actions, but also an indication of where Soviet policy was heading. Bohlen, however, felt that ideology was usually moulded in the service of Soviet political aims.

The amount of experience with Soviet affairs, and proximity to Moscow, had a deep effect on how those in the administration interpreted Soviet actions. There was an inverse relationship between the amount of time spent in Moscow and the belief that the Soviets were slaves to their own doctrines. Dulles had limited direct exposure to the Soviets prior to becoming Secretary of State, attending only foreign ministers meetings with his counterparts dealing with the post-war settlement and the founding of the UN. Between 1953-1956 he only met the Soviet foreign minister four times.¹⁶

With the exception of a very brief tenure on a Russian affairs committee in 1918, Dulles was no more interested in communism than he was in many other foreign policy issues until the end of the Second World War.¹⁷ His involvement in forging a post-war settlement thrust him into dealing extensively with the Soviets. He studied Marxist-Leninist doctrine to help understand the Soviet mentality. In particular, Stalin's *Problems of Leninism* caused him to form a perception of the Soviets as unflinchingly bound to communist ideology and wedded to conspiratorial methods. He blamed the Soviets personally for preventing the world he wanted to create via ecumenicalism and the UN. His involvement in numerous post-war foreign ministers meetings also gave him the impression that the Soviets were obstructionist of Western intentions, and expansionist in their own schemes.¹⁸

In contrast, Bohlen (and the other members of his staff in Moscow such as Jacob Beam and Robert Tucker) had spent significant time either in Moscow or in other capitals with active communist parties. In particular, Bohlen was one of the first men trained by the State Department in the 1920s when the need for Russian specialists was recognised. He was on the staff of the first U.S. embassy in the

¹⁶ Dulles' foreign travels are listed here:

<https://history.state.gov/departmenthistory/travels/secretary/dulles-john-foster>

¹⁷ Richard H. Immerman, *John Foster Dulles: Piety, Pragmatism, and Power in U.S. Foreign Policy*, Biographies in American Foreign Policy, no. 2 (Wilmington, Del: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 7; Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 452-453.

¹⁸ Section on Dulles in the introduction, as well as: Hoopes, *Devil and Dulles*, chap. 5; Preston, *Sword of the Spirit*, 451-457.

USSR after relations were normalised.¹⁹ These Foreign Service officers studied the Soviet Union in great detail for many years and gained a first-hand appreciation of Soviet society. This enabled them to see that ideology was often changed in the service of Soviet policy, and not the other way around. Bohlen was the first to seriously urge a rethink of how the Soviets were understood. His presence in Moscow played a key role in this. Better able to appreciate the nuances of the political and social atmosphere in the USSR, he could see that destalinisation mattered a great deal for the U.S. as soon as it began in 1953. Perversely, his position there as Ambassador meant that he could not create policy, and could do little to influence it, and could only 'observe and report'. This was part of the reason why Dulles was keen on him being there.

Location also mattered in that it had a deep impact on the ability of policymakers and analysts to express their views of the Soviets. Some of the most perceptive analysis of destalinisation came from people who at some point were stationed in Moscow, either as diplomats or journalists. The further one was removed from Washington, the less the analysis was affected by political considerations. The danger posed by McCarthyism in the 1953-54 period meant that it was dangerous for anyone in Washington to write a report that was *not* stridently anti-Soviet.

Dulles and Bohlen had vastly different experiences with the Soviets. The result was that when Soviet policy *and* ideology changed, Dulles saw this process as transient or tactical. Dulles maintained this position until 1956, when the monumental changes that were part of the 20th Party Congress forced him to reconsider his conceptions of the Soviets. Bohlen, in contrast, was able to place destalinisation into his broader experiences with the Soviets. This enabled him to sooner realise the magnitude of the changes in the USSR. The closer one was 'to the action', the sooner the gravity of events would prompt a change in perception.

The importance of perception in foreign relations cannot be understated. In the Cold War of the 1950s it was perhaps at its most influential. Destalinisation offered myriad opportunities for changing the relationship between the USSR and the U.S. This thesis has filled that gap. It has offered an examination of the longer-

¹⁹ T Michael Ruddy, *The Cautious Diplomat: Charles E. Bohlen and the Soviet Union, 1929-1969* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1986), chap. 1; Bohlen, *Witness to History, 1929-1969*, chap. 1.

term effects that destalinisation and the leadership changes associated with it had on U.S. perceptions. Of course none of this happened in a vacuum. Domestic politics and the relations with allies played important roles in when and how perceptions changed. Ultimately, however, it was perception that influenced decisions most. The 20th Party Congress had the greatest effect on changing such perceptions. This thesis highlights how decision-makers need to be completely aware of their predispositions towards adversaries, just as they need be aware of other influences in their decisions. It serves no one to judge whether Eisenhower and Dulles could have ended the Cold War during their tenures. But if there is one lesson to be learned from the period under study in this thesis, it is that future policymakers should take heed of the role that perception played in the decision making of the Eisenhower administration, and scrutinise their own prejudices in order they may take the most beneficial decisions possible without needlessly abiding outmoded mindsets.

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