Extract from the Cabinet memorandum by the Acting Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs regarding British policy towards the Soviet Union and Germany, 3 July 1953

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POLICY TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION AND GERMANY

[…]

Policy towards the Soviet Union

3. There is broad agreement between the three Western Powers, and indeed between all the North Atlantic Treaty Powers, on the interpretation of Soviet policy, internal and external, since the death of Stalin. Internal changes, although perhaps less spectacular than some Soviet external moves, are likely to prove more important in the long run. They amount so far to more incentives and less repression for the Soviet population. Although the present 3 or 5-man Directorate seem to be in control, they lack collectively and individually Stalin’s prestige, and the internal situation is clearly less stable than it was under his absolute authority. While we should not fall victims to wishful thinking, there are even possibilities of the situation developing in such a way as seriously to weaken, or at any rate to modify the character of, the Soviet regime. In the external field there have been many steps to reduce international tension, although without affecting basic Soviet long-term policies. These steps can be explained by (i) a desire on the part of the new rulers to acquire popularity and to establish their internal position free from external worries; (ii) fear of America (the atom bomb, industrial potential, and possible impatience); and (iii) a desire to weaken and divide the Western world. The most important gesture so far has been Russian support for an armistice in Korea, but broadly speaking these gestures (for list see Annex), although significant, do not yet amount to much more than “leaving off doing things which we have not been doing to them”. It is by no means clear that the present Soviet rulers are anxious or ready for serious negotiations on current problems; but it is to our advantage on grounds of policy and public relations alike to test out what may prove to be a new situation in Russia. At the best we might over a period obtain a settlement of some problems; if no more, we might prolong the present relaxation in international tension and we might well learn more about the real intentions and capabilities of the present Soviet leaders.

Anglo-American differences about the Soviet Union

4. The main difference between ourselves and the American Administration is that the Americans, no doubt partly influenced by their different domestic situation, have hitherto wanted to let events behind the Iron Curtain develop further before embarking upon any high-level talks. There also seems now to be a new and more dangerous American tendency, which has its roots in the Republican election campaign and was illustrated in a recent statement by Mr. Dulles, to interpret the situation behind the Iron Curtain as already very shaky and therefore to advocate new although unspecified measures to encourage and even promote the early liberation of the satellite countries. It is my intention to resist American pressure for new initiatives of this kind. A policy of pinpricks is calculated to exasperate the Russians and is most unlikely to help the unhappy peoples of the occupied countries. The last thing we want to do is to bait the Russian and satellite Governments into taking violent measures against them. The growing strength of the West is likely to be the best stimulus to the morale of the subject peoples. We must of course keep the spirit of freedom alive in Eastern Europe, but we should also counsel prudence and restraint. Judging by his Press Conference this week, we should have the support of the President.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is also my intention to try and persuade Mr. Dulles that high-level talks with the Russians, of the exploratory and informal character advocated by the Prime Minister, held in due time and after proper preparation might do good and could do no harm, and that it would be a great mistake to take the responsibility upon ourselves of disappointing public expectations about such talks. It should be possible to count on French support on both these issues.

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1. Eisenhower began his press conference on 1 July with a short discussion of the anxieties in satellite countries and of his sympathy for their populations, but did not propose any kind of intervention on the part of the United States. See *Public Papers of the President of the United States, Eisenhower* (1953), 462-463. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)