Telegram from British Ambassador to the Soviet Union, A. Gascoigne, to the Foreign Office, 9 August 1953

CONFIDENTIAL

Guard,

My telegram No. 576: Malenkov’s Speech.

His remarks on Foreign Affairs contained three items of news.

First. The United States no longer has the monopoly of the Hydrogen bomb.

Second. The Soviet Government have assigned one milliard roubles for reconstruction in Korea.

Third. The Soviet Union has no territorial claims on any State.

2. He imposed an important qualification on the familiar statement that the policy of the Soviet Union is one of collaboration and business relations with all countries. The new restricted formula is that the Soviet Union “will develop collaboration and business-like relations with those States which, for their part, aim at strengthening the bonds of friendship and brotherly solidarity with the great Chinese people with all the countries of People’s Democracy”.

3. I think he broke new ground in saying that the Soviet Government attached special importance to the development of good-neighbourly relations with the States along the Soviet borders (Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey, Finland), but expected reciprocal collaboration from the Governments of those States in the development of friendship and the strengthening of security.

4. He listed, rather loosely and in a manner which cannot lay him open to the charge of laying down “preliminary conditions”, the prerequisites for “Great Power” talks if they are to make a significant contribution to the reduction of tension. They included the renunciation of aggressive policies; the settlement of disputes by negotiation and agreement between the interested parties; the abandonment of the policy of ignoring China – the restoration of China’s “lawful place” in United Nations and in the whole system of international relations; the fulfilment by the Great Powers of their obligations under the Charter of United Nations for the maintenance of peace and security, the reduction of armaments and the prohibition of weapons of mass destruction; the withdrawal of opposition to the conclusion of a Five Power peace pact; the solution of the German question on the basis of the undertakings entered into by the Four Powers (i.e. Potsdam), and the termination of a state of affairs in which United Nations acts as “one of the levers of the North Atlantic bloc” and fails to prevent aggression by Member States.

[…]

8. He did not mention Her Majesty’s Government in the United Kingdom as such; nor did he refer directly to the Prime Minister’s speech of May 11. What he did say was that mere verbal recognition by certain political circles in Britain and other countries of the possibility of settling disputes was not enough.

[…]

11. Despite Malenkov’s forceful references to Russia’s armed strength, including his claim to have the Hydrogen bomb, and despite his vicious attack on American policy (which after all amounted only to the usual line), his statement can, I feel, be looked upon with a certain modicum of satisfaction in that it at least denies the inevitability of a [drift] towards a third world war. Furthermore, it shows that there has been no change in Russia’s post-Stalin foreign policy such as some were led to believe would take place after Beria’s fall. This policy is still framed to secure a slackening of East-West tension, partly, I suggest, to permit the new Government to get into its stride, partly to isolate the United States and partly to cause contradictions between the N.A.T.O. Powers and to bring about the collapse of their arrangements for joint defence.

It shows that little progress has been made up to now towards a live and let live understanding with the Kremlin, but that the door still remains ajar – “it would be a crime against humanity if the détente, which is manifesting itself in a certain degree in the international atmosphere, were to yield place to a new intensification of tension”.

12. Malenkov delivered his speech in a firm and incisive tone. He said every word as if he really meant it. The effect was impressive – he certainly seemed to be the master in his own house.

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