Quarterly report on the Soviet Union from British Ambassador to the Soviet Union, W. Hayter[[1]](#footnote-1), to Foreign Secretary, A. Eden, 19 October 1953

CONFIDENTIAL

[…]

SOVIET UNION: QUARTERLY REPORT

July – September 1953

Though there have been events of note in the international sphere, the main interest of the period lies in the internal developments, including the fall of Beriya, and it is, therefore, on these that the report concentrates. Throughout the period the Soviet Government’s foreign policy can be styled basically defensive, due perhaps to a considerable degree to the shock administered to their position by the East German outbreaks in June last. That this might be the effect of the outbreaks was suggested in the report for the June quarter. At the same time Malenkov asserted his claim to be heard in foreign as well as internal policy. His speech before the Supreme Soviet on August 8 included a noteworthy section on foreign affairs, and his speeches to the East German delegation and to the North Korean delegation contained an effective presentation of the Soviet attitude towards the German and the Far Eastern questions. It is worth noting that he is a distinctly capable speaker, able to give a broad survey on occasions and breathe at least fictitious life into the dry bones of Soviet policy and ideology.

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8. Internal developments were linked to international affairs by Malenkov’s claim in his speech of August 8[[2]](#footnote-2) that the United States did not possess the monopoly of the hydrogen bomb; this assertion being reinforced by communiqués published on August 20 and September 18 on the explosion of “one of the types” of hydrogen bomb and on the conclusion of a series of trials and several new types of atomic bomb.[[3]](#footnote-3) Malenkov used his statement on the subject to point what he, perhaps, intended to be the chief lesson of his speech, so far as international affairs were concerned, namely, that Soviet anxiety to relieve tension should not be construed as weakness and that, “given the present correlation of forces”, “peaceful coexistence” was an obligation on East and West alike.

9. In his speech of August 8, Malenkov presented a fairly comprehensive statement of Soviet foreign policy. Among other points, he emphasised his now well-known thesis that there are no disputed or outstanding issues in international affairs which cannot be settled peacefully by negotiation; he repeated that this applied also to Soviet relations with the United States. He spoke of the Soviets’ desire for good relations with their neighbours, and hinted that these countries could achieve good-neighbourly relations with the U.S.S.R. by settling their problems direct and ceasing to rely on Western support. He asserted that the Soviet Union had no territorial claims on any neighbouring State. On the question of great power talks, he contented himself with observing that in the relief of tension “no small part could be played by great-Power negotiations”[[4]](#footnote-4). He said, however, that there were a number of “prerequisites” to such conversations, and went on to speak of the restoration of China to the councils of the nations, a peace pact between the five great Powers, effective progress in the reduction of armaments, and in the prohibition of atomic and other weapons of mass destruction. He then directly raised the German problem. On this he said that it was necessary to proceed from the interests of strengthening the security of the Eastern and Western neighbours of Germany and from the national interests of the German people; for this it was necessary to renounce the policy of drawing Germany into an aggressive military bloc; the U.S.S.R. would devote all its efforts to facilitate the natural unity of Germany and the transformation of Germany into a peaceful, democratic State.

10. The exchange of notes between the three Western Powers and the Soviet Union in which the former endeavoured to find a basis of agreement for a conference on German reunification[[5]](#footnote-5), proceeded throughout the same period. The Soviet Government in their replies showed no inclination to compromise on an agenda by excluding from the discussions items irrelevant to the problem of arranging free elections from which a responsible all-German Government might emerge. Their position on the details concerning Germany reverted to that adopted before Stalin’s death in March, 1952, with minor embellishments. They continued to insist on discussing the whole Germany problem. Moreover, taking advantage of the admission, in our Note of July 15, that peace could not be ultimately ensured without the settlement of still wider problems, they proposed that, in addition to Germany, measures for relaxing international tension should be discussed, with the participation of China in the conference. They continued to maintain this thesis in reply to our Note of September 2, in which we invited them to a Four-Power Conference in Lugano on October 15[[6]](#footnote-6). These somewhat confused exchanges made at least one thing clear, that the Kremlin placed the rehabilitation of the East German Government and their own hold over East Germany before all other considerations. This again was demonstrated by the summoning of the East German governmental delegation to Moscow on August 20[[7]](#footnote-7) and by Malenkov’s speech on that occasion, in which he did not even mention the German Treaty for which the Soviet Government had called in their Note of August 15[[8]](#footnote-8). The delegation was given no time to negotiate seriously, but was presented with several concessions including large financial and economic benefits, the raising of the respective missions at Berlin and Moscow to embassies, and the promised repatriation of many Germans serving sentences of imprisonment in the Soviet Union for minor war crimes.

11. A rather similar course was to be observed as regards Korean developments. A North Korean Government delegation of similar status to the German delegation was invited to Moscow, though, as distinct from the Germans, they settled down to a fortnight’s negotiation[[9]](#footnote-9). The result was impressive in terms of financial and economic assistance, but politically the communiqué issued at the end of the negotiations and Malenkov’s speech at a banquet given to Kim Il Sung gave the impression that the partition of Koreas was accepted as a semi-permanent feature of the international scene, at least until such time as the firm base of a “peaceful, democratic Korea” in the north could absorb its southern neighbours on its own terms.

12. The U.S.S.R. has been noticeably concerned throughout the quarter to stress the bonds of friendship and common interest uniting it with the Chinese People’s Republic. On the 18th of September a telegram from Mao Tse-tung was published, thanking the U.S.S.R. for its economic and technical assistance to the Chinese People’s Republic. In Malenkov’s speech of August 8 at the Korean banquet, China was given both pride of place and emphasis; in fact the speech was more a presentation of Soviet Far Eastern policy than a disquisition on Korea. The Soviet note of September 28 also gave the impression that, unless China was restored to her rightful position in the international comity of nations, progress could hardly be made in relaxing tension elsewhere. At the same time, the right of the Soviet Union to be the leader of the Communist Powers was consistently maintained.

13. As regards Austria, in his August 8 speech Malenkov said, “It is likewise necessary to settle the Austrian question. This requires first of all the removal of artificial obstacles such as the ‘abbreviated treaty’.[[10]](#footnote-10) When, however, the Western Powers offered to remove this obstacle, the Soviet response was petulant and obstructive, and in their Note of September 28, the Soviet Government reverted to the impractical suggestion of continuing discussions on Austria “through the ordinary diplomatic channels”. The plain fact seems to be that they do not intend to negotiate an Austrian Treaty without a German Treaty having first been concluded. On the other hand, as part of the policy of “relaxing tension”, the Soviet Government have made important administrative relaxations in Austria, and have shown themselves more conciliatory on the Allied Council.

14. Soviet policy of developing “business-like” relations with all States, manifested itself in various forms. Commercial agreements were signed between the U.S.S.R. and France, Iceland, Argentina and Denmark, and a supplementary trade protocol with Persia. A mixed Soviet-Persian Commission was established to examine points of difference between the two countries. Diplomatic relations with Israel were re-established on Soviet initiative. A number of exit visas were granted to Soviet nationals with relations abroad[[11]](#footnote-11) – including the “Soviet wife” Mrs. Hall and her son; some Norwegians who had served in the Wehrmacht and had been imprisoned in the Soviet Union after the war were released. [[12]](#footnote-12) The release of the first batch of German prisoners, mentioned above, also gave a fillip to the impression that the “new look” was continuing, despite Russian intransigence on major issues.

15. These conciliatory gestures were, no doubt, calculated to appeal to many groups in many countries, to alleviate disappointment that no real solution to international tension was emanating from the new Soviet Government and to put the blame for the continued deadlock on Western, and primarily American, rather than on Soviet bad faith. There was a marked recrudescence of anti-American propaganda; and the destruction of a Soviet airliner over North Korea aroused violent protests and demands for compensation. Propaganda has been particularly violent in the Soviet press against American attempts to put through the European Defence Community Treaty and against alleged American breaches of the truce in Korea. American Far-Eastern policy was scathingly attacked by Malenkov in his Supreme Soviet and Korean speeches.

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Keywords: Post-war USSR, Post-war Germany, Korea, Post-Stalin leadership, great-power relations, China

1. Hayter, William (1906–1995) - Minister in the British Embassy in Paris (1949–1953), Ambassador in Moscow (1953–1957). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Malenkov’s speech was published in an English-language booklet by the publisher Soviet News; an extract was reprinted in *Documents on International Affairs. 1953*. London, 1956. P. 25-26. See also: Malenkov G. М. Rechꞌ na piatoi sessii Verkhovnogo Soveta SSSR 8 avgusta 1953 g. М., 1953. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Pravitelꞌstvennoe soobshchenie ob ispytanii vodorodnoi bomby v Sovetskom Soiuze [Government report on the testing of a hydrogen bomb in the Soviet Union]. // Pravda. 1953. 20 avgusta; Coobshchenie TASS ob ispytanii novykh tipov atomnykh bomb v Sovetskom Soiuze [TASS report about the testing of new types of atom bomb in the Soviet Union] //Pravda. 1953. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Verified in Malenkov’s speeches. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For the text of the Soviet note of 4 August see: United States Department of State / *Foreign relations of the United States, 1952–1954. Germany and Austria (in two parts)* Volume VII, Part 1 (1952–1954). P. 604-607. For the American reply, the draft of which was composed on 15 August, see ibid, P. 614-616. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The four-way meeting of Foreign Ministers was planned for 15 October 1953 in the Swiss town of Lugano. The main purpose of the discussion was to pose the question of the future of Germany and Austria. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. As a result of talks, economic concessions were made: payment of reparations would come to an end from January 1954; Soviet enterprises in Germany would be passed on to the Government of the DDR; payments towards the cost of the Soviet occupation would be reduced; all DDR debt to the USSR would be written off. Roberts Dzh. Shans dlia mira? Sovetskaia kampaniia v polꞌzu zaversheniia «kholodnoi voiny». 1953 — 1955 gody //Novaia i noveishaia istoriia. 2008. №6. S. 37-439. [The same source in English: Roberts, Geoffrey, ‘A Chance for Peace? The Soviet Campaign to End the Cold War, 1953955’, The Wilson Centre: Cold War International History Project, [https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/chance-for-peace-the-soviet-campaign-to-end-the-cold-war953955](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/chance-for-peace-the-soviet-campaign-to-end-the-cold-war-1953-1955) (Accessed 04.07.2016)]. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. That note stated the following: ‘the restoration of national unity in a democratic Germany remains the fundamental issue for the German people, the resolution of which interests all the peace-loving peoples of Europe … there should be absolutely no delay in adopting measures that could, at the very least, enable the gradual resolution of the unification issue in Germany and the formation of a democratic government for the whole of Germany.’ See Roberts Dzh. Shans dlia mira? Sovetskaia kampaniia v polꞌzu zaversheniia «kholodnoi voiny». 1953 — 1955 gody //Novaia i noveishaia istoriia. 2008. №6. S. 40-41. [The same source available in English: see previous note]. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The visit took place in September 1953. The delegation was led by Kim Il-sung in person. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Verified in Malenkov’s speech. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The “fifteen wives affair” from 1946, when fifteen Soviet women who had married British subjects were refused exit visas (at the exact same time twenty other women received permission to leave). They were later accused of espionage and tried. The reference in this text is to Clara Hall, who lived for 18 months in the British Embassy waiting for permission to leave. See: Golubtsova О.V. Liubovꞌ po lend-lizu: dokumentalꞌnaia povestꞌ po sudꞌbakh zhenshchin druzhivshikh s inostrantsami. Arkhangelꞌsk, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. In all, there were more than a hundred Norwegians in captivity, of which 83 would be freed. See Rossiia i SSSR v voinakh XX veka: poteri booruzhennykh sil. Staticheskoe iccledovanie. М., 2001. S. 512. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)