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The 1952 Stalin Note Debate: Myth or Missed Opportunity for German Unification?

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On 10 March 1952, the government of the Soviet Union handed its fellow occupiers of Germany—France, Great Britain, and the United States—a proposal for the resolution of the German problem as it had existed since 1945. The Kremlin wanted to hold a four-power conference for the establishment of a united, independent, neutral German state that for self-defense purposes would be permitted to have an army and a military industry; with this German state a peace-treaty was to be concluded.¹ This initiative led to an exchange of diplomatic notes between the Soviet Union and the West that lasted through the summer of 1952. In the end, the four-power conference suggested by Moscow did not take place and Germany remained divided, causing historians and others, particularly in the Federal Republic of Germany, forever after to either lament or reject the Stalin note as a missed opportunity to unify the country almost four decades before East Germany's collapse led to that result in 1989-1990.

In 1985, the historian Rolf Steininger began a new round of the historical debate with his essay *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?* [A Chance for Reunification?], based on new American and, especially, British sources.² By unearthing this new evidence, Steininger did add to our knowledge, especially, if not exclusively, of the Western response to the Soviet initiative. However, in addition to the role of historian Steininger adopted a participatory position in the political debate on 1952 and after. Throughout Steininger's work, history and political advocacy operated as one. Reunification, as proposed in Stalin's offer of March 10, was possible and desirable in 1952 and should have been pursued, Steininger asserted. As could be read on the first page of the essay, in the final analysis the question was: "who is responsible for the continuing split of the country[?]"³ Ultimately, Steininger's objective was highly political, as several of his antagonists pointed out in what quickly became a polemical debate in the Federal Republic (West Germany). Of course, Steininger's preference was a perfectly legitimate position from a citizen's point of view. But when taken as a working premise by a historian, the result turned out, at least in the present author's assessment, to be rather unpersuasive.⁴

¹For the text of the Stalin note, see *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1952-1954*, vol. 7: *Germany and Austria* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 169-173.

²Rolf Steininger, *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung? Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952: Darstellung und Dokumentation auf der Grundlage unveröffentlichter britischer und amerikanischer Akten* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1985). This was not Steininger's first work on this subject; see also *Deutsche Geschichte 1945-1961: Darstellung und Dokumentation in zwei Bänden* (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1983), and Joseph Foscaphoth, ed., *Kalter Krieg und deutsche Frage: Deutschland im Wiederstreit der Mächte 1945-1952* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985). All translations from the German by the author.

³*Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 15.

⁴In 1989, Steininger again addressed the Stalin note, while also answering his critics. In this combative article he demonstrated how personal and political the German historical discussion of the Stalin-note had become during the 1980s: "Freie gesamtdeutsche Wahlen am 16. November 1952? Noch einmal: die Stalin-Note – Reaktionen auf ein Buch und ein Neues amerikanisches Dokument," in Jürgen Weber, ed., *Die Republik der fünfziger Jahren: Adenauers Deutschlandpolitik auf dem Prüfstand* (Munich: Olzog, 1989), 88-111. Steininger seems to have influenced the American historian Thomas A. Schwartz. Initially, in his 1985 Ph.D. dissertation, Schwartz wrote of the Stalin-note

Yet, it is the translation of Steininger's essay that represents the latest we have in English on the Stalin note.⁵ This has given many in the English-speaking world a rather limited view of the entire Stalin note debate. Today, with the rigorous rewriting of Cold War history facilitated by the opening of East-bloc archives, a thorough re-evaluation of what Germans, but apparently Germans alone, have called "the question of the century" is not only possible, but also long overdue.⁶

Identity and Judgement

Arnulf Baring put it succinctly in 1982: the 1952 note addresses "a most topical issue, that will remain of immediate interest as long as the Germans have not come to grips with their own statehood [*Staatlichkeit*]." ⁷ For the better part of the Cold War era, the Stalin note has indeed been at the center of the (West) German national debate. The question historians and others have struggled with most is whether the Stalin-note represented an opportunity for German unification, and whether, considering the outcome, 1952 was *Eine verpaßte Gelegenheit*, a wasted opportunity.⁸ Interestingly enough, the Stalin note debate did not begin in 1952. As Manfred Kittel has shown recently, the importance of "1952" as an opportunity for reunification increased at about the same rate as the chances for a resolution of Germany's division diminished during the 1950s. Furthermore, domestic politics played an important role at the birth of the "myth of the

episode: "The Allied management of the early phase of the 'battle of the notes' was a clear success. ... Ironically the major differences among the Western powers about the notes did not emerge until after the treaties were signed. ... The 'lost opportunity,' like many legends, is appealing when allowed to remain a legend." *From Occupation to Alliance: John J. McCloy and the Allied High Commission in the Federal Republic of Germany, 1949-1952* (PhD Dissertation: Harvard University, 1985), 619-621. In the book derived from this dissertation, Schwartz, in part basing his argument on Steininger—"who has argued forcefully that the note was a serious offer"—shifted his emphasis considerably: "It is clear ... that the Western powers, principally the United States, insisted that German leaders make a choice between pressing for negotiations for reunification and following the path of European integration and tight association with the United States. Adenauer made that choice." *America's Germany: John J. McCloy and the Federal Republic of Germany* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 380, 268.

⁵*The German Question: The Stalin Note of 1952 and the Problem of Reunification* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

⁶During a panel discussion on the Stalin note at the conference "Germany and the Cold War" (organized by the Cold War International History Project and the Kulturwissenschaftliches Institut of the University of Essen, Essen, Germany, 29 June 1994), a German questioner professed disappointment at what he called a lack of progress on this "question of the century." A member of the panel, Alexander O. Chubarian, director of the Institute of Universal History in Moscow, responded by saying that for Russian historians, the Stalin note episode has always been a relatively minor one in the larger context of the Cold War in Europe. The same viewpoint may be attributed to Chubarian's non-German, Western colleagues.

⁷Hans-Peter Schwarz, ed., *Die Legende von der verpaßten Gelegenheit* (Stuttgart: Belser, 1982), 82.

⁸A second question, inevitably following from the first but not frequently treated as such, is *what kind of* united Germany could, or rather *should*, have emerged. It is this second question that gives the case of the Stalin note its timeless dimension, for united Germany's role in Europe and beyond, its international identity, is likely to remain a contentious issue, especially (but not only) among Germans.

wasted opportunity."⁹ This birth occurred on 23 January 1958, during a debate in the West German *Bundestag*, when two of Chancellor Adenauer's ex-ministers, Thomas Dehler and Gustav Heinemann, attacked the Chancellor's reunification policy, or lack thereof, in a most spectacular fashion. The myth has led a wholesome life since, especially during the 1980s when Western archives opened their files on the period and, in a largely separate but at the same time related development, West German historians began once more to grapple with the legacy of their nation's "unmasterable past" in the *Historikerstreit*. Both this battle and the fight over "1952" had West Germany's national and international identity at its core.¹⁰

In the debate over "1952" it has often been forgotten that *in* 1952, in spite of all the anxieties about the country's division, the Federal Republic knew a wide consensus on the Germany policy of the Western allies and Chancellor Adenauer, and the credibility of Stalin's regime was extremely low.¹¹ This amnesia has caused later combatants to attribute much greater sincerity to Stalin than his contemporaries gave him credit for. With the help of East German and Soviet archival materials, we are now learning that Stalin's Western contemporaries were correct. Today, there is enough evidence to assert that "1952" was not a wasted opportunity.¹² The Stalin-note was not an opportunity for unification and can therefore not have been "wasted." The debate may continue, it most probably will, but it will be increasingly difficult to argue the opposite.¹³

During the 1980s, however, the Cold War was still on, and the Berlin and Moscow archives were closed. Historians had to rely on Western sources, ever more abundantly available, and mostly circumstantial evidence on the motives of "the other side." West German Stalin-note combatants also relied on memory—if they had been political or diplomatic actors in 1952—or,

⁹Manfred Kittel, "Genesis einer Legende. Die Diskussion um die Stalin-Noten in der Bundesrepublik 1952-1958," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 41:3 (1994), 355-389.

¹⁰See Charles S. Maier's account of the *Historikerstreit*, a battle that became truly national through the participation of, among others, philosophers, journalists, novelists, and politicians. *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988).

¹¹See below, notes 80 and 105.

¹²In fact, the more evidence we get the more reason there is to believe that a united Germany, regardless of its guise or status, was not an option in 1952.

¹³For a remarkably creative, but equally unpersuasive attempt to do so, see Wilfried Loth, *Stalins ungeliebtes Kind. Warum Moskau die DDR nicht wollte* (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1994). This book has sparked a little debate of its own, see Wilfried Loth, "Stalin die deutsche Frage und die DDR," *Deutschland Archiv* 28:3 (1995), 290-298, for Loth's reply to his critics and a nice summary of his major argument; and Gerhard Wettig's response, "Stalin - Patriot und Demokrat für Deutschland?," *Deutschland Archiv* 28:7 (1995), 743-748; and Loth's angry rejoinder, "Kritik ohne Grundlagen. Erwiderung auf Gerhard Wettig," *ibid.*, 749, 750.

See also Gottfried Niedhart, "Schweigen als Pflicht. Warum Konrad Adenauer die Stalin-Note vom 10. März nicht ausloten ließ," *Die Zeit*, 13 March 1992 (U.S. edition), p. 13, for a benign view of Adenauer's actions; Peter Bender, "Adenauer, Erhard, Kiesinger und die DDR," *Die Zeit*, 18 June 1993 (U.S. edition), p. 16, a more critical piece; and an eye-witness account from East Berlin, Fritz Schenk, "Die lange Schatten Josef Stalins. Erinnerungen and die Deutschland-Note und das Scheitern der Berliner Außenministerkonferenz 1954," *Frankfurter Allgemeine*, 10 March 1994, p. 12.

especially, their political intuition or predilections. As Baring said, this could not be otherwise; the topic was too close to home, addressing, as it did, issues of identity. Questions historians of the 1980s asked included: what kind of country could, or should, Germany have become after World War II? Did we have to become what we still are today—a divided nation? Was the policy of the Western allies and Adenauer toward the Soviet proposal our only, or best, option? Writers such as Rolf Steininger and Joseph Foschepoth replied to these last two questions with a resounding "nein!", while the likes of Hermann Graml gave the opposite answer.¹⁴

In the end, the Stalin-note debate comes back to the old, basic Cold War question: did it have to become so polarized; did it have to go on for so long; could not East and West have gotten along on the basis of a resolution of major sticking points like Germany? In other words, it is more than a fight between the defenders of Acheson, Adenauer, Bidault, Eden, and McCloy and those who reject the Western policies of the early 1950s. As with most Cold War questions, an evaluation of the Stalin-note episode requires an assessment of the possibilities at the time for genuine East-West cooperation. This involves judgement, just as it did for the participants. What makes politics important, and the writing of its history instructive, is that one finds poor and better judgement. Some are better at taking stock of the critical factors and their relative weight in particular circumstances than others. "1952" certainly is a case where judgement mattered a lot. Today, thanks mainly to the new Soviet and East German documentary evidence on the early 1950s, we are in a good position to re-evaluate the judgement of both the Western policymakers of 1952 and their critic(s) of the 1980s. From the latter group, Rolf Steininger's work should have a special place. Not only is the translation of his essay the latest we have had in English on the Stalin note since 1990, but *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?* also set the tone for the debate on "the question of the century" between 1985 and the end of the Cold War.

Before 1989

For Rolf Steininger, West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer was guilty of deliberately thwarting German reunification. It was Adenauer who in spring 1952 prevented the Western allies from taking Stalin up on his offer for a four-power conference on the German problem.

"Adenauer ... did not want negotiations, this is decisive!"¹⁵ Steininger's argument rested on two pillars: the Soviet Union was sincere in offering reunification, and while the Western powers were willing to explore the offer, Adenauer strangled every move in that direction. This argument can be dealt with in two ways: a re-examination of the evidence Steininger had available in 1985, and

¹⁴ We will encounter these major figures and their positions throughout this article, along with the views of other participants. Needless to say that representing an opinion with one word is a rhetorical distortion: all opinions, as we will see, were a little more complicated than that.

¹⁵ *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 47.

the incorporation of evidence that has recently become available through Soviet and East German archives. This article will, true to its own history, do first the one, and then the other (with the Western side coming last), in order to make clear that with and without East Bloc evidence the "lost opportunity" case can be shown to be a very weak one. Central questions are: what do we know about the Kremlin's objectives; and how should we assess the Western response to this Soviet initiative, especially Adenauer's influence with the Western powers?

In his examination of Stalin's intentions, Steininger contradicted himself somewhat when he argued, on the one hand, that the West should have engaged Stalin in talks in order to find out whether he really was willing to allow reunification, but on the other hand assumed throughout his work and even explicitly asserted that "there really can be no doubt that in the spring of 1952 Stalin was willing to grant Germany reunification."¹⁶ But that aside, the real question is, what kind of reunification might Stalin have been willing to accept? What did the Soviets really want to achieve with their initiative?

Lack of documentary evidence about Soviet motives has been the single most important reason why the episode of the Stalin-note remained a contentious issue for so long. However, historians could have taken solace from what Vojtech Mastny has written on the history of Stalin's "road to the Cold War": "the true challenge is not so much in having to make out without the inaccessible [sources] as in coming to grips with those actually at hand."¹⁷ Specifically, it is important to see Soviet Cold War policy as interactive with its international environment, and to acknowledge the dynamic and evolutionary character of East-West relations in the late 1940s and early 1950s, in order to understand the Stalin note episode in its proper context. By 1952, a seven-year long experience with the other had left marks in both East and West and had caused changes in expectations and priorities on both sides. The options of 1952 were different from, and less numerous, than those of 1945, or even 1948.

During the 1980s, as well as before, most authors seemed to agree that after the establishment of separate German states in 1949, Soviet policy on German issues responded to developments in the West.¹⁸ Stalin's March 1952 note itself is a good example. It was issued a few weeks before the Federal Republic was to sign on to the newly created European Defense Community (EDC) or, put differently and probably more relevant from a Soviet perspective, just

¹⁶Ibid., 27, 28.

¹⁷*Russia's Road to the Cold War: Diplomacy, Warfare, and the Politics of Communism, 1941-1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), p. xv. Even with the help of Soviet documents it is questionable if we can come to any definitive conclusions about what Stalin thought. See also Hermann-Josef Rupieper, *Der besetzte Verbündete: Die amerikanische Deutschlandpolitik 1949-1955* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991), 258. This is not to say that what went on in Stalin's mind is the only piece of the puzzle of Soviet policy in this case. What came out, for example, is much more relevant.

¹⁸See, e.g., Hans Buchheim, *Deutschlandpolitik 1949-1972: Der politisch-diplomatische Prozess* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1984), 60; and below, notes 36-38.

before the beginning of West Germany's remilitarization. In exchange, West Germany was to gain almost complete sovereignty under a second treaty, also to be signed in May 1952, the German General Treaty. Nobody in the debate about the Stalin-note has doubted that one of Stalin's aims was to prevent West German participation in the EDC. And although the note was addressed to the Western powers, Stalin, it seems, was primarily speaking to a German audience, especially West German public opinion.¹⁹ It would have been very difficult for the Western allies to reject the Soviet proposal had West German public opinion or the Adenauer government demanded its exploration. But was Stalin really addressing the West Germans? Although his proposal contained elements that were certainly attractive to them—such as, of course, the prospect of national unity—other parts were not attractive at all. The Soviet note insisted that the Oder-Neisse line be the Eastern border of a united Germany, something that few Germans at the time were willing to accept. It also excluded German membership in the EDC or NATO, and possibly also in a European Economic Community (EEC), and gave free, all-German elections less emphasis than many Germans (not to mention Americans) thought they deserved.

Stalin's note also contained elements that were disquieting, if nothing more, to the West, especially France. Whereas Germans may have been interested in an independent German army and arms industry, the French most likely were not. The same went for an appeal to former officers of the *Wehrmacht* and National-Socialists, who were promised full equality in a united Germany. Furthermore, there is no evidence that at any point during the exchange of notes the Soviet Union tried to support its initiative with diplomatic activity in the Western capitals or Moscow.²⁰

Turning to Moscow's zone of occupation, official East German activities at the time, insofar as they were visible to the public, did not show great enthusiasm for an accommodation with the West. On the one hand the ruling communist party (SED) and the press hailed the Stalin-note as the chance all Germans had been hoping for, but on the other the rhetoric against West German capitalism, Bonn politicians, and *ex-Wehrmacht* officers in the Federal Republic continued. This could point to certain hidden Soviet objectives for a united Germany, a plan to maintain as much influence as possible for Moscow and its German allies, in line with Soviet policy toward Germany up to this point.²¹ Since the Second World War this policy had pursued two major objectives: the weakening of Germany's military and industrial potential—through the imposition of

¹⁹See, e.g., Gerd Bucerius, at the time a Christian Democratic member of the West German parliament, in Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Die Legende von der verpassten Gelegenheit*, 73, and the assessment of U.S. Charge d'Affaires in Moscow, H. Cummings, of 28 March 1952, in Steininger, *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 175.

²⁰For discussions of these inconsistencies in Stalin's proposal: Hans Buchheim, *Deutschlandpolitik*, 59-61, and Hermann Graml, "Nationalstaat oder deutscher Teilstaat: Die sowjetischen Noten vom Jahre 1952 und die öffentliche Meinung in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 25:4 (1977), 821-865, and Graml, *Die Märznote von 1952: Legende und Wirklichkeit* (Melle: Knoth, 1988), 38, 51, 52.

²¹Graml, "Nationalstaat oder deutscher Teilstaat," 799; *Die Märznote*, 27, 28.

harsh reparations—and the establishment of as much Soviet political influence over the country as possible.²² After the watershed year of 1949 the emphasis shifted somewhat toward the implementation of the Soviet system in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in a more systematic way, combined with efforts to keep the German question open, but never was there any indication Moscow was willing to yield control.²³

That the Soviet Union was unwilling to yield all it had gained control over in Germany since 1945 was suggested by East German Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl in a speech on 14 March 1952 (either this, or East Berlin was acting independently at the time, an unlikely proposition). In his speech, Grotewohl demanded that: West Germany break off its ties with the West; the economy of a united Germany be modelled on the East German five-year plans; and only "peaceloving" (as defined by the GDR) organizations could participate in German political life.²⁴ Furthermore, in April the GDR began a military reorganization, in which for the first time the phrase "national army" was used. The East German and Soviet leaders justified this by pointing to similar developments (e.g., the EDC) in the West.²⁵

There is little doubt that by 1952 the Soviets and the SED regime had scant support among the population of East Germany and that they had been unsuccessful in organizing an effective economic structure.²⁶ Soviet and East German leaders may have expected the West to reject Stalin's proposals and planned to use this rejection as justification for much-needed Soviet consolidation in the GDR.²⁷ This became the conclusion of Hermann Graml. Having failed to find either clear indications of a Soviet expansionist urge in Europe at the time or solid evidence that Stalin was serious about German unification, Graml concluded that the Stalin-note was an offensive meant to accompany the consolidation of Soviet power in the GDR, as well as East Germany's rearmament.²⁸ He further emphasized that developments in and around Germany after the war leading to the establishment of two German states tied to the two great powers "were not results but elements and crucial factors of the larger [East-West] conflict." It was an illusion to

²² Boris Meissner and Jürgen K. Hoesch, "Deutschland und Österreich," in Dietrich Geyer, ed., *Osteuropa Handbuch: Sowjetunion: Außenpolitik I, 1917-1955* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1972), 448.

²³ *Ibid.*, 473, 474.

²⁴ *Tägliche Rundschau*, 15 March 1952, quoted in Hermann Graml, "Die Legende von der verpaßten Gelegenheit," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 29:3 (1981), 322.

²⁵ Generally, the pace of Sovietization was stepped up in the GDR in this period. See for example: Gottfried Zieger, "Zur sowjetischen Deutschlandnote vom 10. März 1952," in Georg Brunner et al. eds., *Sowjetsystem und Ostrecht: Festschrift für Boris Meissner zum 70. Geburtstag* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1985), 765-769.

²⁶ See, e.g., the comments by the East Germany and Soviet specialist of the West German Social Democrats at the time, Stephan G. Thomas, in Schwarz, *Die Legende von der verpaßten Gelegenheit*, 58-61.

²⁷ Graml, *Die Märznote*, 62.

²⁸ Graml, "Nationalstaat oder deutscher Teilstaat," 840-842.

think that a four-power conference could solve the German problem, and Stalin must have realized this.²⁹

However persuasive Graml's arguments, there was another perspective from which this issue could be viewed, one that had been put forward in the early 1970s by the Harvard historian Adam Ulam, who wrote that only "an extremely urgent danger" could have moved Stalin to give up a "conquest" like the GDR. "But the fear of a German army backed by the United States and on the borders of the Soviet empire was a real fear felt by the Soviet policy-makers ...," Ulam wrote. "And to conjure away his real fears Stalin was ready to pay highly."³⁰ Moreover, Ulam asserted, at the end of the Cold War, during the late 1940s and early 1950s, the GDR "was for the Kremlin a bargaining chip, rather than a permanent addition to the Communist camp. ... German Communists, like many other detachments of the world movement, were in Stalin's eyes expendable whenever his own power interests and the security of the Soviet Union were at stake."³¹

We do have other evidence coming from the Soviet side in 1952, for instance the comments and statements made by various Soviet and East German officials.³² In April 1952, the West learned from the recently defected spokesman of GDR foreign minister Georg Dertinger, Gerald Rummmler, that the Soviet envoy to East Berlin, Georgy Pushkin, had told Dertinger that the Stalin note was only a propaganda offensive, the Soviets were not considering sacrificing the SED regime in free elections. Rummmler said that according to Pushkin, the Soviet Union saw West German membership in the EDC as NATO membership in disguise, and it hoped to bring about the fall of the Adenauer government and prevent West German membership in these organizations.³³ In early May 1952, a Soviet diplomat stationed in London made a similar comment: the Soviet initiative was meant only to stabilize the GDR.³⁴

Another, more questionable source is the famous conversation between Stalin and the Italian socialist Pietro Nenni in Moscow in July 1952. Steininger used one particular report on this

²⁹ Ibid., 830-832.

³⁰ Adam B. Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 537. This was merely a (plausible) suggestion; Ulam did not provide any specific evidence.

³¹ Adam B. Ulam, *The Communists: The Story of Power and Lost Illusions: 1948-1991* (New York: Scribner's, 1992), 73. Again, this argument seems to be based more on a vast experience with the study of Soviet foreign policy than any concrete piece of evidence.

³² Here one must remember that the German question was not the same question after May 1952, when the General and the EDC treaties were signed. It may not have been a very open question any more in the months before the signing either, but it was certainly less open afterwards. See Andreas Hillgruber's cautionary remark in this regard in Schwarz, *Die Legende von der verpassten Gelegenheit*, 64-67.

³³ Rupieper, *Der besetzte Verbündete*, 253-255.

³⁴ Graml, "Die Legende von der verpassten Gelegenheit," 333. Steininger contrasted this remark with one made at the time by another Soviet diplomat, Vladykin, second counsellor of the Soviet embassy in Washington. Vladykin maintained to the French ambassador in the United States that the Soviet Union was serious about German unification. *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 24, 25.

meeting which seemed to indicate a genuine interest on Stalin's part in unification. However, there exist four different accounts of this conversation, and it appears that Stalin in fact said very little about Germany, and most probably did not comment specifically on his March initiative. The confusion stems from the fact that it is not entirely clear what was said on Germany, when, and by whom during Nenni's visit. The socialist leader also talked to other Politburo members while in Moscow, and before arriving there visited Berlin, where he met with reportedly anxious East German leaders. During his journey, as well as afterwards, Nenni often talked about all these meetings, without, however, always making clear who had told him what. But actually, the safest thing one can say about these talks, it seems, is that Stalin declared that he now had to make the best of the reality of a divided Germany with the Federal Republic in the Western alliance.³⁵

The insight some of these sources have to offer notwithstanding, most crucial in interpreting Stalin's initiative is its immediate context: Soviet foreign policy between 1949 and 1952. How does the March note fit that policy? Was West German membership in the EDC, in Ulam's words, "an extremely urgent danger" for Stalin? Was the dictator willing to pay a high price to avert it? How much flexibility was the Soviet Union capable of in international affairs? Was it feasible that the Soviet Union, being on the defensive, would give up something it had gained (in this case the GDR)? Was the Soviet Union actually on the defensive in 1952? What was the role of ideology in Soviet foreign policy? And how much influence did Stalin's lieutenants have on its formulation and execution?

As we saw earlier, Soviet policy toward Germany after 1949—partly expressed through GDR initiatives—responded to the gradual political rehabilitation of the Federal Republic and its increasing participation in Western economic, political, and military organizations. Moscow's objective seems to have been twofold: preventing West German integration with the West, especially in the military sphere, and maintaining as much control as possible over events in all of Germany. From the founding of the GDR in 1949 until the anti-communist uprising in that state of 17 June 1953, Moscow's and East Berlin's expressed interest in a unified Germany was at its high

³⁵ The best treatments of the Stalin-Nenni meeting are: Hermann-Josef Rupieper, "Zu den sowjetischen Deutschlandnoten 1952: Das Gespräch Stalin-Nenni," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 33:3 (1985), 547-557; and Henri Rollet, "Un Nouveau Serpent de Mer: La Note Soviétique du 10 Mars 1952 et la Visite de Pietro Nenni a Staline," *Revue d'Histoire Diplomatique* 3/4 (1988), 297-317. The four sources are: a British Foreign Office Document that reports on the conversation on the basis of information provided by the Canadian Embassy in Moscow, in Steininger, *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 282; a report by the U.S. ambassador to the Soviet Union, George F. Kennan, based on a conversation with the Italian ambassador in Moscow, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol. 6: *Western Europe and Canada* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1986), 1584-1587; a *New York Herald Tribune* column of 12 August 1952 by the Aisop brothers; and Pietro Nenni's diary, *Tempo di Guerra Fredda: Diari 1943-1956* (Milan: Sugarlo, 1981). As Rollet and Rupieper conclude, Kennan's report seems the most credible, especially, as Rollet emphasizes, because it accords most precisely with Nenni's diary account.

point in postwar Soviet foreign policy.³⁶ It was the ongoing and, from the fall of 1950, quickly intensifying cooperation between the Federal Republic and the West that caused Moscow and East Berlin to propose four-power talks on Germany, approach the West Germans with plans for a German dialogue ("Germans at one table"), and indicate that the terms under which Germany might be unified were negotiable.

This action-reaction pattern started after the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. During the summer, discussions in Western Europe and the United States about West German participation in a common defense effort intensified, culminating in October in the acceptance of the French Pleven Plan and in December in the NATO compromise on a German contribution to a West European defense organization. Moscow responded by assembling the leaders of its East European satellites (Prague, October 1950) and by proposing a four-power conference on Germany (November 3). In 1951, in the face of intensifying cooperation between the Federal Republic and the West, the SED regime also stepped up its efforts to open an East-West dialogue on the German question. East Berlin issued several direct calls on West Germany to start talking about general elections and other aspects of unification. Neither in the case of the Soviet overtures to Britain, France, and the United States, nor in the exchanges between the two Germanies, did Moscow and East Berlin indicate that they might satisfy the crucial Western prerequisite of a free, all-German election monitored by independent outsiders.³⁷ By early 1952, time seemed to be running out for Stalin. At the NATO Lisbon conference the West took a further step toward military consolidation (the organization actually expanded in several ways), West German rehabilitation continued simultaneously (Chancellor Adenauer attended the conference of the three Western foreign ministers in London in February), and the signing of the EDC treaty was scheduled to take place before the summer. In February, therefore, many in the West expected another Soviet initiative, especially after the East Germans on the 13th of that month issued an appeal to Germany's occupying powers to finally get together and resolve the German problem.³⁸

³⁶ Meissner, "Deutschland und Österreich," 473, 474; Hermann Achimov, "Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik in den Jahren 1952/1953: Einwände und Ergänzungen," *Osteuropa* 14:4 (1964), 256. That the interest in a unified Germany was at its high point in these years does not necessarily mean that it was very high, or even genuine.

³⁷ Konrad Adenauer, *Erinnerungen*, vol.2 (1953-1955) (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlag Anstalt, 1966), 21-66. George Kennan at the time, and Rolf Steininger, Joseph Foschepoth, and Adam Ulam subsequently, have all labelled the Western demands of this period as deliberately obstructive to any negotiation process about German elections. See, respectively, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:303; *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 45; *Adenauer und die deutsche Frage* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 44; *Expansion and Coexistence*, 537.

³⁸ For the text of the East German appeal see: *Beziehungen DDR-UdSSR 1949 bis 1955*. 1. Halbband (Berlin: Staatsverlag der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, 1975), 338-340. People who said they expected a new Soviet initiative included West German State Secretary for German affairs Franz Thedieck and Social Democrat Herbert Wehner: Graml, *Die Märznote*, 37; U.S. High Commissioner John J. McCloy always worried about this: Hans-Peter Schwarz, ed., *Adenauer und die hohen Kommissare II: 1952* (Munich: Oldenburg, 1990), 304, 305, 416; also, Graml, "Die Legende von der verpaßten Gelegenheit," 307-316. See also the memorandum of Secretary of State Dean

The Soviets presented the Stalin note as a response to this East German request. The proposal again seemed to suggest flexibility.

The question is whether Soviet initiatives between late 1950 and spring 1952 were taken solely to disturb developments in the West and prevent West German rehabilitation and incorporation into Western economic and military structures, or whether Stalin was also willing to contemplate a united Germany. If we assume, for the sake of the argument, that the latter was the case, the question remains how the Soviet leader may have thought that the reunification of Germany would change the Cold War, and improve the position of the Soviet Union. Also, was Stalin confident enough to allow a neutral, but democratic and independent Germany—in the Western sense of those words—to emerge? Was he, or was the apparatus he headed, actually capable of handling what undoubtedly would be a very complicated and risky enterprise?

Stalin himself by this time was an aging and increasingly suspicious leader whose intellectual capacities appear to have been waning rapidly. It is not unreasonable to assume that the dictator was unable to deal with every aspect of Soviet foreign policy personally. Nevertheless, Stalin was still the man in charge, and one of the things he seemed to be pursuing in 1952 was a new round of purges. In the sinister atmosphere of the Kremlin during his final years, some questions of policy may not have received the systematic attention they deserved. Stalin was probably incapable of doing so, and his terrified associates cannot have been eager to take the initiative.³⁹ As the American ambassador to the Soviet Union at the time, George F. Kennan, wrote on 20 June 1952:

I see evidence which leads me to believe that Stalin's personality is still making itself felt from time to time in [the] formulation and conduct of Soviet policy. [...] On the other hand, there seems to me to be considerable evidence that his participation in public affairs is sporadic and relatively superficial as compared with period before and during the war.⁴⁰

Acheson to President Truman, 11 March 1952, Dean Acheson Papers Harry S. Truman Library, Independence, MO, Box 67: Memoranda of Conversations, January-July 1952.

³⁹ Vojtech Mastny has written that "the opportunities were more apparent than real. ... In the last months of Stalin's life, the country was all but paralysed by terror as the tyrant, bent on re-creating the Great Purge, was preparing a wholesale slaughter of his entourage." "Threat Perceptions on the Wane: the 1980s from the Perspective of the 1950s," in Carl Christoph Schweitzer, ed., *The Changing Western Analysis of the Soviet Threat* (New York: St. Martin's, 1990), 298.

⁴⁰ Kennan to Department of State, 20 June 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, vol.8: *Eastern Europe, Soviet Union, Eastern Mediterranean* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1988), 1014-1015. On May 25, in a reaction to the third Soviet note to the Western powers, Kennan had written: "This is not the authentic, terse, collected, menacing voice of Stalin's Kremlin when functioning in high gear and pursuing an important Soviet initiative. On the contrary, document seems to me to show signs of having been prepared by hacks supplied only with grudging, cryptic and guarded instruction and told to make the best of it." *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7: 252, 253. This last remark can point to several conclusions: (1) Stalin did not involve himself with the execution of foreign policy very much any more; (2) by this time, the Soviet leadership had lost all interest in the exchange of notes with the West; (3)

Stalin's mental health during the last years of his life poses a real problem for the analyst of Soviet foreign policy in these years. How much of Soviet policy in these years was really his?⁴¹ However, in spite of the fact that the dictator was going downhill in 1952, we should be wary of attributing too much influence to people like N. Khrushchev, G. Malenkov, and L. Beria, let alone someone like V. Semyonov.⁴²

Still, there is some reason to believe that at least from 1949 there was a debate in the Kremlin between advocates of two different policies toward the German problem: hard-liners, favoring rapid Sovietization of the GDR and rejecting overtures to the West on German unification, and those in favor of a more flexible policy, possibly favoring a return to a situation similar to that before World War II when the Soviet Union had been playing "the German card" in European politics.⁴³ Representatives of the hard line seem to have included Khrushchev and Nikolai Bulganin, while Beria and Malenkov apparently advocated the more flexible policy. Boris Meissner, on whose work Rolf Steininger relied heavily, attributed great significance to this reading of Kremlin power struggles.⁴⁴ His conclusion was that initially, during the spring of 1952, the Soviet Union was willing, as he put it, to take German national interests into consideration and normalize relations with the West. He made four points in support of this: the Stalin note came at a time (1951-1952) when the Soviet Union advocated the creation of a zone of neutral states in Europe, separating East and West; in this period, the Soviet Union also advocated "peaceful coexistence;" Stalin in the article *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, which he wrote in February 1952, seemed to expect a resurgence of "Germany" and Japan that would lead to conflicts in the capitalist world rather than to war between the capitalist and socialist worlds; and, most importantly, immediately after Stalin's death in March 1953, when Beria and Malenkov were the most influential among the successors, there was a return in Soviet policy to a more flexible approach toward the West and greater skepticism regarding Sovietization of the

Soviet foreign policymaking was becoming paralyzed by internal factors such as Stalin's increasing paranoia and power-struggles in the Kremlin; (4) all of the above. The correct answer most probably is (4).

⁴¹ See also below, notes 44-46.

⁴² Back in the 1960s, Walter Osten saw Soviet German policy during the early 1950s mostly in terms of a battle between certain factions in the Soviet leadership, with V. Semyonov, political counselor of the Soviet government in East Germany, as a key figure in the execution of the policy. "Die Deutschlandpolitik der Sowjetunion in den Jahren 1952/53," *Osteuropa* 14:1 (1964), 1-13. Hermann Achimov then criticized Osten and emphasized the importance of Stalin himself (see note 36). Boris Meissner took a middle position in these early speculations, saying that after 1949 Kremlin power struggles and discussions over policy in the Soviet leadership became more influential on Soviet foreign policy but that Stalin was still the person in control. "Deutschland und Österreich," 473, 474.

⁴³ Apparently, Soviet specialists in the State Department in 1952 thought the latter a possibility too. See the despatch of British Charge in Washington, Christopher Steel, to Frank Roberts at the Foreign Office, 3 April 1952, in Steininger, *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 186.

⁴⁴ "Deutschland und Österreich," and also Schwarz, *Die Legende von der verpassten Gelegenheit*, 72, 73.

GDR. Meissner argued that when this flexible policy had been abandoned in the summer of 1952 the reason was developments in the Kremlin power struggle (a weakening of Beria's position) and not so much the failure to prevent West Germany's signature on the EDC treaty in May. In 1953, of course, the flexible policy soon received a lethal setback with first the anti-communist uprising in East Germany (June 17), and, one month after that, the fall of Beria.⁴⁵ Stalin, Beria, and Malenkov failed, Meissner said, because they were not strong enough:

It seems that Stalin too, despite the unlimited character of his absolute power, did not have the strength to impose his new German and European policy against the strong counterforces in the Party and army leadership. Because of his death, he was unable to complete the purge he had begun after the example of the 1930s.⁴⁶

It is by no means clear that this is an accurate reading of Kremlin politics or policy at the time. Is there any evidence that Stalin was ever inclined (for the Germans' sake) to "take German national interests into consideration"? How do we decide whether openly avowed Soviet objectives, for example a zone of neutral states in Europe, were serious, or merely propaganda aimed at Western public opinion? And does the fact that there appeared to be differences of opinion among Soviet leaders also mean that these could have led to fundamentally different policies? Specifically, how far would Beria have been willing to go with his own policy, not only in the spring of 1953 (when he is usually seen as pursuing a relatively "flexible" policy regarding Germany) but also in early 1952? Finally, that Beria and Malenkov were not strong enough to have their way is not too surprising, but *Stalin*?

Also, Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, assuming that its message can be deciphered clearly, is a problematic source.⁴⁷ Stalin's thesis seems clear: before and during the Second World War,

the struggle of the capitalist countries for markets and their desire to crush their competitors proved in practice to be stronger than the contradictions between the capitalist camp and the socialist camp. What guarantee is there, then, that Germany and Japan will not rise again, will not attempt to break out of American bondage and live their own independent lives? I think there is no such guarantee. But it follows from this that the inevitability of wars between capitalist countries remains in force.⁴⁸

⁴⁵"Deutschland und Österreich," 482, 483.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 486.

⁴⁷ Meissner took its argument seriously, and Hermann Achimov did so even more: "Stalin concluded with his thesis that the Soviet Union had the means to disrupt the unity of the West—namely German reunification—and he ordered that they be used if the Western efforts to achieve unity were succeeding." "Die sowjetische Deutschlandpolitik," 254.

⁴⁸ J.V. Stalin, "Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.," in Bruce Franklin, ed., *The Essential Stalin* (Garden City: Double Day, 1972), 469-473. [Ed. note: For newly available contemporaneous documentation of Stalin's concerns about Germany and Japan, see, e.g., his comments to Mao Zedong in October 1950 and to Zhou Enlai in September 1952, in *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 6-7 (Winter 1995/1996), 116, 18.]

It may not be entirely clear whether Stalin was talking about a united Germany (earlier in this section he used "Western Germany"), but this is not the point. The point is that, in this piece, Stalin deemed the chance for a war (at least initially) greater inside the capitalist world than for one between the capitalists and his own empire. If this is what he really believed, Stalin cannot have been too concerned about German unification. A unified, capitalist Germany, after all, would fight other capitalist powers, especially the United States, rather than the Soviet Union. Before we accept this or any other interpretation of *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.*, however, we should remember Adam Ulam's reading, from his biography of Stalin: "One must sympathize with those, whether in the U.S.S.R. or abroad, who tried to decipher some meaning, hidden or otherwise, in these senile outpourings."⁴⁹ In 1952, George Kennan concluded something similar: "the theses put forward in this document reflected a certain senility of outlook – the mentality of a rapidly aging man who had lost the ability either to learn or forget."⁵⁰

But if we accept the thesis of *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R.* at face value, the Stalin-note fits rather well, for a remilitarized West Germany in alliance with the United States and the rest of the West was quite a different thing from a unified, non-aligned Germany, and must have been viewed in the Kremlin as a much greater threat to the Soviet Union. Without the Federal Republic the Western military and economic organizations would be much weaker than with the Germans, if they survived at all.⁵¹ Moreover, a unified Germany might turn against the West, as Stalin believed. In short, a unified Germany could, at least in the short run, decrease the Western pressure on the Soviet Union and increase Soviet options in foreign policy.

On second thought, however, it seems unlikely that the Soviet government interpreted Stalin's thesis in this manner. By 1952, a united, neutral, but independent Germany would have created a rather dangerous situation for Moscow, in spite of Stalin's apparent theoretical or ideological self-confidence. There could be no predicting what the policies of a united Germany would be, but the likelihood of an anti-Soviet all-German foreign policy was at least as great as a more free-floating one. Was the Kremlin really so self-confident–convinced of its own strength and appeal as a potential partner—that it could have contemplated taking the risk of cutting Germany loose? A contemporary perspective on the mood in the Kremlin suggests it was not. Soviet behavior, Ambassador Kennan wrote on 6 June 1952, was

one of reckless contempt for whatever values and safeguards might conceivably still lie in the maintenance of the normal diplomatic channel and of the basic amenities of international intercourse. [Unlike during the 1930s] there is a note of bravado—the excited, uncertain bravado of a parvenu who thinks his fortunes have advanced to

⁴⁹ Adam B. Ulam, *Stalin: The Man and His Era* (New York: Viking, 1973), 730.

⁵⁰ George F. Kennan, *Memoirs 1950-1963* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 169.

⁵¹ See below, notes 58 and 60.

the point where he need no longer pretend to be a man of correct behavior or even a man of respect for correct behavior.⁵²

Apparently, Kennan wrote, the Soviet leaders hoped that the capitalists' strength would "be sapped by internal factors," aided by a little pressure from the communist world.⁵³ But this hope could hardly be seen as originating in Soviet self-confidence, Kennan wrote a week later. It was a

persistent and despairing hope that present structure of Western World will prove unstable, unsound, and increasingly inadequate to withstand the steady political attacks levied against it by world Commie movement. [...] In the present shrill exaggerations of Sov[iet] propaganda one cannot help but sense an extreme nervousness about the validity of this thesis, a feeling of desperate necessity to find substantiation for it, and accordingly a somewhat frantic casting around for any set of straw that could possibly be conceived to support it.⁵⁴

Far from being self-confident, the Kremlin leadership actually appeared rather insecure in 1952. West Germany's remilitarization in the EDC framework was an important, but not the only, reason for their anxiety.⁵⁵

This insecurity, one could argue, was even more reason for Moscow to seek a (neutral) unified Germany. But one really has to wonder how firmly Stalin and his consorts believed in the inevitability of war in a capitalist world that included a unified Germany. Did developments in West Germany, Western Europe, and the United States not point to increased (anti-Soviet) cooperation instead of internal capitalist discord? In this regard the 1950s were rather fundamentally different from the 1920s and 1930s. And what guarantee was there that the population of East Germany would not be attracted to the more positive aspects of the capitalist world as they were beginning to manifest themselves in, for instance, West Germany's *Wirtschaftswunder*? In the nuclear age, moreover, how could the Kremlin be certain that the armed forces of a non-aligned, unified Germany would not become a threat to Soviet interests? What guarantee was there that the Germans would remain satisfied with an inferior army when the rest of the developed world was acquiring nuclear weapons?⁵⁶

⁵² Kennan to Matthews, 6 June 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 8:999-1000.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 993-995.

⁵⁴ Kennan to Department of State, 13 June 1952, *ibid.*, 1000, 1001.

⁵⁵ After 1951 the *entire* Soviet bloc was in a state of crisis, stemming largely from Soviet efforts after 1949 rapidly to consolidate its position in Eastern Europe. Central to this effort at consolidation was the build-up of arms industries and the militarization of the East European societies. After Stalin's death in 1953 his successors authorized significant changes to stabilize the situation. Karel Kaplan, *The Overcoming of the Regime Crisis after Stalin's Death in Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary* (Cologne: Index, 1986), 6-13.

⁵⁶ For this last insight I am indebted to historian Marc Trachtenberg (conversation on 13 March 1992). In 1952, Adenauer alluded to this point when he discussed the part of the Stalin note which stated that the scope and character of Germany's defense forces and arms industry were to be determined in a treaty. The chancellor made two points in this regard: this part of the Stalin note revealed that the Soviet Union was unwilling to accept a truly independent Germany, and, second, in light of the technological progress that had been made since World War II it was not in Germany's interest to build an arms industry of its own, Germany was too far behind. Conversation on 2 April

The most that can be said of Soviet self-confidence is that Stalin was anxious somehow to take advantage of Soviet conventional military superiority in Europe before the West got its act together through any combination of EDC and NATO that included the Federal Republic.⁵⁷ As regards the Bonn Republic, reversing the trends that were leading to its remilitarization and incorporation into Western military, political, and economic structures, therefore, was Moscow's primary and probably sole aim after 1950. To achieve this, however, something falling short of actual German reunification would have been sufficient, as well as preferable. The Western integration process would have been interrupted for a least several months and possibly much longer, had the Stalin note been able to win over West German public opinion. "I said that if they were successful in delaying [the Western treaties] beyond 1952," Dean Acheson recorded on 17 March 1952, "the Soviet Union could be fairly confident that the proposals themselves were dead and they wouldn't need to worry about them further."⁵⁸ Along the way, all Western countries, but especially France and the United States, would have questioned West Germany's commitment to the West. Old anxieties—which after the war had never disappeared—about a new German "Rapallo" foreign policy would have acquired new life, and might have doomed the efforts to build a common West European defense organization.⁵⁹ West German enthusiasm for Stalin's proposal would probably also have led the American officials to re-evaluate the U.S. commitment to the defense of Western Europe. Washington saw West German participation as crucial to its own

1952, in *Adenauer: Teegespräche 1950-1954*, Hanns Jürgen Küsters, ed. (Berlin: Siedler, 1984), 228; also Adenauer, *Erinnerungen*, vol. II, 70-72.

⁵⁷ We have known for quite a while that at a meeting in Moscow in January 1951 Stalin told East European leaders precisely this. Account of Alexej Cepicka, defense minister of Czechoslovakia present at the meeting, in Karel Kaplan, *Dans les archives du Comité Central: trente ans de secrets du bloc soviétique* (Paris: Albin Michels, 1978), 165, 166. See also Teresa Thoranska, *"Them": Stalin's Polish Puppets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 46; interview with Edward Ochab, Poland's first deputy defense minister, chief political commissar of the Polish forces, and secretary of the Polish communist party's Central Committee at the time (*ibid.*, 34).

⁵⁸ Conversation with Dr. Raymond Allen, Director, Psychological Strategy Board, in Dean Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Box 67: Memoranda of Conversations, January-July, 1952. On 12 April 1952, in the midst of the exchange of notes with Moscow, Acheson wrote John McCloy that the "next six months and especially next six to ten weeks represent a crucial period in our efforts to prevent Soviet manipulation of unity issue from checkmating integration of FedRep with West." *FRUS, 1952-1954, 7:203*. On April 15, McCloy, about to return to private life, replied: "since there is so much need for keeping the pressure on the contractuals [the German General Treaty and the EDC treaty] and the financial arrangements, I feel I should not come home. ... Moreover, the whole situation in Germany at the moment is astir. The Soviets are playing their heaviest cards as one would expect they would to deflect our policy of European integration." Quoted in Schwartz, *From Occupation to Alliance*, 618. Even after the signing of the treaties in May, Acheson remained extremely concerned, as can be seen in his efforts in June to dissuade the British and the French from seriously proposing a four-power conference. This was the time when the West German parliament was debating whether to ratify the EDC. "If we wreck plans for Ger ratification we would be proceeding down the road to disaster. ... Secy stated he could not be responsible for hazarding the results of one and half years and asked if London and Paris fully appreciated dangers of delay in Ger ratification." Secretary of State to U.S. embassy in France, 19 June 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954, 7:272, 273*.

⁵⁹ For the French side of the exchange of notes, see Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut, *Frankreich und die deutsche Einheit: Die Haltung der französischen Regierung und Öffentlichkeit zu den Stalin-Noten 1952* (Munich: Oldenburg, 1988), 120, 121.

participation in such a defense.⁶⁰ All this could have been achieved long before a four-power conference would even begin to discuss German reunification.

If, then, we take into account, first the inconsistencies of the March 10 proposal and, second, the Soviet postwar negotiating record with the West on Germany and other questions,⁶¹ and if we also accept that Stalin could not count on gaining from German unification in self-determination, then it becomes plausible that the Stalin-note was a last, desperate attempt by an anxious Soviet regime to prevent West German membership in the EDC through the creation of political disarray in West Germany and by extension the rest of Western Europe as well as the United States, but nothing more. Proposing German reunification was a means to an end for Moscow, not an end in itself: The end was the disruption of the Western integration policies. For this end, the Stalin-note contained some potentially powerful elements; before its publication one could not predict how West German public opinion would react. For German reunification, however, it fell far short. From a Soviet perspective, Stalin's initiative might eventually produce a unified, non-aligned Germany—preferable, perhaps, to West German integration with the West, for it might increase immediate Soviet foreign policy options. But the Stalin-note could just as well, if not more likely, result in long, protracted negotiations and continued four-power control over Germany. Either outcome would serve Soviet interests (although the latter probably more so) so long as the Stalin note succeeded in torpedoing the EDC and West Germany's rehabilitation.⁶²

In light of this discussion, Steininger's assertion that "there really can be no doubt that in the spring of 1952 Stalin was willing to grant Germany reunification" is puzzling. There is little doubt that the Kremlin had great fears about West German remilitarization under an American umbrella. But in response Stalin produced a proposal with terms that were ambiguous at best, and which in its entirety could hardly be seen as a serious offer for negotiations with the West. If Stalin was serious at all in offering Germany unification, he can, like the West, only have been

⁶⁰ See Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969), 435-440, 442-445, 485, 486; Acheson told Konrad Adenauer in late 1951 that, 1952 being an election year in the United States, there was not much time left to conclude the EDC process successfully and ensure U.S. participation: Adenauer, *Erinnerungen I* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1965), 513-515; *Erinnerungen II*, 87; Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 629, 630. See also Wolfram F. Hanrieder, *Deutschland, Europa, Amerika* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1991), 183.

⁶¹ Adam Ulam has written that by 1952 "the experiences of Yalta and Potsdam had taught the United States to be wary of any, even the most conciliatory Soviet invitations to the negotiating table." *The Communists*, 103.

⁶² Western officials feared that the outcome of Stalin's initiative would be long, fruitless negotiations over Germany, as they had experienced them so often in the recent past, most recently in Paris, between March and June 1950. See U.S. ambassador James C. Dunn's report of 19 March 1952 on the French view; British ambassador Oliver Harvey's despatch from Paris of 21 March 1952; and Britain's Washington Charge Steel's communication to Frank Roberts at the Foreign Office, all in Steininger, *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 49, 161, 186. Also: Acheson to the US embassy in London, 14 March 1952, expressing fear that the Soviets might allow free elections in Germany but would then stall during the negotiations for a peace treaty, creating a situation no better than the deadlock on Austria, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:176.

thinking of unification on his own terms. But taking into account also its timing, the final verdict (without the post-1990 evidence) on the Stalin-note must be that, to borrow Ulam's words, "to conjure away" his real fear of a remilitarized West Germany supported by the United States, Stalin was ready and trying to make the West pay highly, not the Soviet Union.

Wilhelm Pieck's Papers and Gerhard Wettig's Research

New evidence from both East German and Soviet archives largely confirms these conclusions. The new evidence is still far from comprehensive, but at the same time quite indicative of the main thrust of Soviet strategy for Germany after 1945. Perhaps most telling is that all the documents that have emerged so far point *away* from the idea that Stalin at any point seriously considered giving up control of his part of Germany.

One of the most revealing new documentary sources is the Wilhelm Pieck papers, containing notes this old German communist and first president of the GDR made in preparation for, during, or after meetings he and other East German communists had between 1945 and 1953 with the Soviet politbureau. These notes are few and far in between, but their contents are rather suggestive. In fact, they suggest a pattern.⁶³

The first postwar meeting between Stalin and his German allies that was recorded by Pieck took place 4 June 1945. This meeting produced the now famous sentence from Pieck's notes: *Perspektive - es wird zwei Deutschlands geben - trotz aller Einheit der Verbündeten.* (Perspective - there will be two Germanies - in spite of all the unity of the allies).⁶⁴ However, it is not entirely clear what this means. It would go too far to argue that as early as June 1945 Stalin had decided upon the permanent division of Germany, especially since the notes also report the Soviet

⁶³ See also on the Pieck papers: Rolf Badstübner and Wilfried Loth, eds., *Wilhelm Pieck, Aufzeichnungen zur Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1953* (Berlin: Akademie, 1994); R.C. Raack, "Stalin Plans his Post-War Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 28 (1993), 53-73; Dietrich Staritz, "The SED, Stalin, and the German Question: Interests and Decision Making in the Light of New Sources," *German History* 10:3 (1992), 274-289; and Gerhard Wettig, "Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 als geschichtswissenschaftliches Problem: Ein gewandeltes Problemverständnis," *Deutschland Archiv* 25:2 (1992), 157-167, and Elke Scherstjanoi's reaction with Wettig's rejoinder in *Deutschland Archiv* 25:8 (1992), 858-862.

On other new evidence from the SED archives and Moscow, see, e.g., Michael Lemke, "Doppelte Alleinvertretung: Die nationalen Iedervereinigungskonzepte der beiden deutschen Regierungen und die Grundzüge ihrer politischen Realisierung in der DDR (1949-1952/53)," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 40:6 (1992), 531-543; Daniil E. Mechnikov, "Illusionen oder eine verpasste Chance? Zur sowjetischen Deutschlandpolitik 1945-1952," (Aufgezeichnet von Richard Buchner), *Osteuropa* 41:6 (1991), 593-601.

⁶⁴ *Pieck Papers*, Zentrales Parteiarchiv (Central Party Archive, ZP; today: Stiftung Archiv der Parteien und Massenorganisationen der DDR im Bundesarchiv), NL 36/629. Heinrich Bodensieck has argued, after a meticulous examination of the original documents in the Pieck files, that Wilhelm Pieck himself may not have been present at the meeting with Stalin on June 4. Furthermore, Bodensieck says that Stalin, rather than having a plan for the division of Germany as this early point in time, was cautiously hedging his bets, and that his country's relationship with the Western Allies was the crucial factor in his calculations. "Wilhelm Piecks Moskauer Aufzeichnungen Vom '4/6.45,'" in Alexander Fischer, ed., *Studien zur Geschichte der SBZ/DDR. Schriftenreihe der Gesellschaft für Deutschlandforschung* 38 (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1993), 29-55.

dictator's objections to what is described as a British-American plan for the dismemberment of the country. "Unity of Germany to be ensured through united *KPD* [Communist Party Germany], united *ZK* [Central Committee]."65 Moscow may have expected a division but its objective at this time seems to have been a communist-dominated Germany. When party leader Walter Ulbricht reported on a visit to Moscow on 6 February 1946, Pieck's notes reflect similar ideas: "Unification understood - course correct [...] Transition question; Situation totally different; in Russia shortest route; [...] in the West parl[iamentary] traditions; democratically to workers power, not dictatorship."66

A year later, when a delegation of SED leaders was back in Moscow, the message was somewhat different, but, one could say, so was the world. Increasingly East and West found themselves confronting each other, as in the standoffs over Iran, the Turkish Straits, and also Greece. In Germany, Britain and the United States had created "Bizonia," which epitomized close cooperation between their occupation zones out of frustration with the deadlock with Moscow over all-German questions. The Anglo-American move also stemmed from a clearly felt need for policies that would accomplish some measure of normalization of German life, a normalization in which the Germans themselves would play a role. What the East Germans heard at the meeting on 31 January 1947 seems to illustrate that the Kremlin believed that developments in and around Germany were not unfolding according to plan. In a clear reference to "Bizonia" the Soviet leaders complained about the policies of the West:

Engl[and], Am[erica] Fr[ance] want Federalism, because this means weakening of Germany. Weak Germany should have no influence on the worldmarket, no foreign trade, and therefore no central government, no central authority [either]. [...] Hum[an] progress requires that G[ermany] rises again a[nd has] access to the world market. 70 Million Germans cannot be stricken from the history of the world. Americans live under the illusion that [they can] deal with the world market on their own.

And a little later:

Americans speak of econ[omic] unity, but are against unified] government - without pol[itical] unity, however, means econ[omic] unification - unification of the occupiers. The quicker German unity a[nd] Ger[man] government, the easier we make recovery, therefore against Federalism - this [is] connected with higher burdens.

Moscow, the notes go on, will for the time being have to accept a division of the country, and prepare for an interim administration in the Soviet zone. The ultimate Soviet aim remains a single

65 ZP, NL 36/629.

66 ZP, NL 36/631. Answering the question "who said what?" obviously becomes very difficult here. At the same time, it is very unlikely that at this early point there existed much if any divergence between SED and Kremlin views. Even if Ulbricht and his SED colleagues did have different ideas on the future of their country, the realization that they depended completely on Soviet support can have led them to only one conclusion: do exactly as Stalin says.

central German government, controlled by the Allies, that can sign a peace treaty.⁶⁷ The remarks about a Germany trading freely with the rest of the world strike as somewhat insincere. After all, it was not that the Soviet leaders had such a good record in allowing their own subjects or, at the time, the countries of Eastern Europe to play an active role on the world economic scene. Much more, these remarks seem to express regret that the prospect of gaining political influence in and benefiting economically from Western Germany was being lost, all of which surely meant "higher burdens" on the enterprise of running the Soviet occupation zone.⁶⁸

Two years later, this enterprise was still not proceeding smoothly. Pieck's notes from a December 1948 meeting in Moscow confirm that the Soviets and the East German communists understood this very clearly. In the meantime, the international situation had not exactly improved, either. This was the time of the Berlin blockade and the Western decision to establish a separate West German state. Ongoing efforts to establish SED control over all segments of life in the Soviet occupation zone, supported or at least tolerated by the population, were not producing the desired results, primarily because the regime failed to improve the lives of its subjects. And while the economic situation remained tight, political conformism was becoming stifling. Stalin, therefore, urged caution upon his German allies.

No dispossession - too early [...] not yet a people's democracy; not move against groups of owners - only against individuals, when they regulate sabotage through economic means [...] no direct interventions but zig zag - opportunist policy toward socialism - why; situation not identical with P[people's] D[emocracy]; no un[ited] state yet; do not stand yet on the eve of power [...] lowering of prices, raising of wages; improve food [situation]; fight too obvious; cautious policy needed⁶⁹

If there is anything in these minutes about Soviet desires for German unification, it is something along the lines of a viewpoint that could be paraphrased as: "we are not fully in charge yet—for the time being we should go slow so that we do not jeopardize our ultimate goal of a single, communist German state."

⁶⁷ ZP, NL 36/694.

⁶⁸ For this meeting we now also have the Soviet minutes: Bernd Bonwetsch and Geanady Boryugov, "Stalin und die SBZ. Ein Besuch der SED-Führung in Moskau vom 30. Januar-7 Februar 1947," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 42:2 (1994), 279-303. Bonwetsch and Boryugov include four documents prepared by the Central Committee's department for foreign policy pertaining to the SED visit: 1) Biographical information on the four German visitors: Wilhelm Pieck, Walter Ulbricht, Otto Grotewohl, and Max Fechner; 2) Background information on the (West German) SPD; 3) Minutes of the 31 January 1947 meeting between Stalin and other Soviet leaders and the SED delegation. The minutes are more extensive than, but not fundamentally different from, Pieck's notes and consist of the following parts: a reference to Pieck's opening remarks; Grotewohl's discussion of the situation in the Soviet occupation zone and the tasks for the SED, complete with interruptions by Stalin and Molotov; some remarks by Molotov; Stalin's remarks; and a short back and forth between the two sides at the end of the meeting. 4) A memorandum prepared by the CPSU CC foreign policy department on the entire, week-long visit by the Germans.

⁶⁹ ZP, NL 36/695.

Although this is not the place to discuss in detail Stalin's foreign policy during the immediate postwar years, some general comments are in order because much of the evidence recently unearthed on this issue, as well as on Moscow's policies for Germany, bears more or less directly on questions related to the 1952 Stalin note. First of all, it seems clear that from 1945 onward Stalin had a fundamentally antagonistic view of relations with the West and Japan. He expected the Soviet Union to be involved in another major war in 15-30 years, and consequently was determined that this time his country prepare itself properly and therefore should avoid a war until sufficient strength was achieved.⁷⁰ The dictator rejected conciliatory or accommodationist policies toward the enemy (even if these would serve to buy Moscow time) for such policies in his eyes would be taken as a sign of weakness and ran the risk of inviting greater pressure on or aggression against the Soviet Union.⁷¹ Whereas optimism and anxiety were both always present when Stalin looked outward, it appears that during the first couple of years after the war's end optimism about the Soviet Union's prospects in Europe and elsewhere had the upper hand, while later (mid-1947 usually being taken as a turning point)⁷² anxiety took over (even though Stalin had good reason again to be optimistic during the second half of 1949).⁷³

Regarding Germany, Stalin's policy represented a true paradox: on the one hand, Moscow was genuinely interested in a unified Germany, on the other it did just about everything possible (though not always deliberately) to prevent even the population of its own zone of occupation from

⁷⁰ Sergei N. Goncharov, John W. Lewis, and Xue Litai, *Uncertain Partners. Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 3, 55, 56, 70-72; David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 124, 151, 235, 272 (especially), 289-291; Brian Murray, "Stalin, The Cold War, And The Division of China: A Multi-Archival Mystery," Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 12 (Washington, D.C.: CWIHP, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, June 1995), especially the appended Document 1, "Stenographic Record of a Speech by Comrade J. V. Stalin at a Special Session of the Politburo, March 14, 1948," pp. 18-21: see also pp. 10-14 for a discussion of the authenticity of this and other appended documents.

Holloway's discussion of Stalin's *Economic Problems of Socialism in the USSR*, in the context of an attack on economist Eugen Varga's argument against the inevitability of war between the capitalist and communist blocs, incidentally, does make one wonder whether some of the attempts, including this author's, to demonstrate or falsify this article's relevance for the March note of 1952 are not somewhat contrived. Stalin, on second thought, was really taking a "long" or "deep" approach in this piece, one in which the German question itself is of relative unimportance. One should see this article as a warning that the Soviet Union could again be dragged into a capitalist war, just as had happened in 1941. *Stalin and the Bomb*, 289-291. See also William Curti Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance: Power and Perceptions During the Cold War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), e.g., p. 76.

⁷¹ See Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, 272, 284-288, 292. For Stalin's foreign policy during these years, see also Wohlforth, *The Elusive Balance*, chaps. 3, 4, and 5.

⁷² See, e.g., Scott D. Parrish and Mikhail M. Narinski, "New Evidence of the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947: Two Reports," Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 9 (Washington, D.C.: CWIHP, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, March 1994); John Lewis Gaddis, "Rethinking Cold War History," Contemporary History Institute Occasional Paper No. 22 (Athens: CHI, Ohio University, March 1995), p. 9.

⁷³ See Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, *Uncertain Partners*, 71, 72. For how Stalin remained fundamentally wary about his country's international position, see Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, 268-270.

uniting behind the SED regime—to say nothing of creating a following in the Western parts of the country.⁷⁴ Due to what might be called ideological blindness or romanticism these two components were reconcilable for the Soviets, at least for a time.⁷⁵ The change here, similar to but more gradual than the one in overall Soviet foreign policy, came as the Kremlin became less certain that history was on its side. By the late 1940s it became clear that a majority of the German population, East and West, most probably would not voluntarily choose Moscow's side in the Cold War. The very best that could be hoped for after 1949 was a West Germany choosing to "fall between two chairs" by pursuing reunification rather than Western integration. But in spite of the difficulties involved with the latter process, neutralism in the Federal Republic remained weak. In the GDR, as the uprising of June 1953 would confirm, people were increasingly choosing sides against their communist rulers. As a result of all this, and in response to Western steps toward the rehabilitation and integration of the Federal Republic, Moscow's unification objective underwent an almost complete metamorphosis and by 1951 at the latest had turned into an instrument for the disruption of the Western policies regarding the Federal Republic.⁷⁶

The implications for interpreting the Stalin note might be seen as follows: In light of what has been learned about Stalin's preoccupation with displaying strength, the view that in 1952 real give-and-take negotiations over Germany were possible seems very dubious. More significant, the central question regarding Stalin's unification proposals was really not whether he was or was not

⁷⁴ A prominent debate in Germany on the new evidence concerning Stalin's policy is that between Wilfried Loth and Gerhard Wettig (see n. 13). Both accept that for quite a while after 1945 Stalin wanted a unified Germany. They differ vehemently, however, whether in the dictator's eyes this was to be a democratic country in the Western sense, as Loth believes, or not. A good way to explore this issue is to read David Pike's study, *The Politics of Culture in Soviet-Occupied Germany, 1945-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993). Pike has minutely examined public policy pronouncements of the SED leadership at the time as well as other "old" but still very useful evidence and has also incorporated much of the "new" sources. He is extremely effective in pointing out the rhetorical acrobatics the KPD, later SED, engaged in (unsuccessfully) in order to convince people that its old communists had really changed and that the new regime's objective actually was the creation of an open society. For what the Soviets and KPD/SED were actually doing in the eastern zone of occupation see Norman M. Naimark, "Die Sowjetische Militäradministration in Deutschland und die Frage des Stalinismus," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 43:4 (1995), 295-297, as well as his "To Know Everything And To Report Everything Worth Knowing': Building the East German Police State, 1945-1949," Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 10 (Washington, D.C.: CWIHP, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, August 1994). Both articles foreshadow in part Naimark's major new study, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁷⁵ In the words of Gerhard Wettig: "The obvious contradiction can be plausibly explained if one takes Soviet ideology seriously. That is, the idea that Germany might be politically conquered for both the communist system and the Soviet power sphere by appeals to the Germans' national longing for unity (which was indeed strong at the time), has to be seen as not a pretended but genuine conviction which crucially determined policies." "All German Unity and East German Separation in Soviet Policy, 1947-1949," in *Jahrbuch für Kommunismusforschung* (Berlin: Akademie, 1994), 122-139, quote on 138. See also Gaddis, "Rethinking Cold War History."

⁷⁶ For an author who continues to see it differently see Michael Lemke, "Die DDR und die Deutsche Frage, 1949-1955," in Wilfried Loth, ed., *Die deutsche Frage in die Nachkriegszeit* (Berlin: Akademie, 1994), 136-171, especially 162-164. Lemke believes that by the spring of 1952 the Kremlin still expected all of Germany to go left, keep its distance from the West, and eventually maybe even become communist.

willing to give up control of his zone through some deal with the Washington, London, and Paris. (This is, of course, how the "missed opportunity" has always been discussed in the West). The Kremlin as well as its SED dependents in East Berlin, did not see the issue in terms of an inevitable give and take. The way they hoped to bring about reunification was through an arrangement in which SED power would be preserved and ultimately extended over all of Germany. The crucial event in this process would not be negotiations with the Western powers but a fundamental shift in (West) German public opinion that would leave the allies no choice but to allow the Germans to fall off the Western chair and ultimately take a seat on the other side of the fence.

It is, however, difficult to see how anyone in Moscow or East Berlin believed in this for very long after the emergence of the two separate German states in 1949.⁷⁷ The Pieck notes of December 1948 indicate that Soviet and East German leaders fully understood that the SED regime was not exactly gaining in popularity. Even more revealing are Pieck's notes taken at Moscow meetings in 1952 and some new evidence from the Soviet foreign ministry archives.

The last Pieck notes concern SED visits to the Kremlin on 1 and 7 April 1952. By this time, two German states had come into existence, and with the war in Korea the West Europeans, together with the United States, had begun a major rearmament effort that included the Federal Republic. Soviet and East German efforts since 1950 to interfere with this effort had proved fruitless. The SED leadership arrived in Moscow just one week after the USSR had received the Western reply to Stalin's March note. This reply did contain an opportunity for Stalin, had he desired to use it, to make life difficult for the West: as they had done in 1951, the United States, Britain, and France continued to call for a United Nations assessment of the conditions for free elections in both German states.⁷⁸ Stalin could have picked up on this and, at least, slowed down the Western integration process. But he did not do so. Instead, he held what must have been two rather hectic meetings with the SED leadership, skipping over many topics the East Germans had politely proposed for discussion. "Create People's Army - without noise; Pacifist period is over," Pieck, Ulbricht and the others heard on April 1. And also: "Become vigilant, we will help you." On April 7 Stalin summarized the situation:

Thus far all proposals rejected; no compromises; Creation European army - not against S[oviet] U[nion], but to retain control of Europe [...] we must count on [i.e., expect] terrorist acts; Reestablish the liquidated Soviet commands - 3000; Arming has to proceed, immediately Russian rifles with ammunition. Military

⁷⁷ A memoir indicating that Stalin had changed his mind perhaps as early as 1948 is Milovan Djilas' *Conversations with Stalin* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1962). Djilas has Stalin say in January 1948: "The West will make Western Germany their own, and we shall turn Eastern Germany into our state" (p. 153) Stalin is also supposed to have explained to Mao sometime after the summer of 1949 that "Europe is still not ready for socialism" (as opposed to Asia). Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue, *Uncertain Partners*, 71, 72.

⁷⁸ See Acheson to HICOG, 22 March 1952, and Cumming to Department of State, 25 March 1952, in *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:189-191.

training for infantry, navy, air force, submarines, tanks [...] Not a militia, but a trained army. All without noise, but swiftly⁷⁹

The Soviets also ordered a tightening of communist control in the East German countryside, also to be executed without too much force or noise, but forthrightly nonetheless.

Stalin gave up on his note very quickly, if he ever expected it to succeed. One week after a Western reply that permitted him to stir things up a little more in the West he instead accepted the EDC ("European army") as inevitable and acted accordingly, ordering a major military mobilization in East Germany. As early as April 1, Stalin concluded that his effort to get West German public opinion on his side had failed. Only this explains this total abandonment so early in the game of the ultimate effort to thwart EDC. After all, Stalin's arsenal of diplomatic options was not yet exhausted. He could have suggested his agreement to a UN assessment of conditions for free elections in the GDR. What *did* seem exhausted, however, judging from the cautious if not suspicious response of West German public opinion to the March 10 note, was the Soviet leader's arsenal of propaganda options. The Germans were not interested, at least not enough to cause a change in Western policies.⁸⁰

The argument that the Stalin note really was just a propaganda ploy, as both the circumstantial and the Pieck evidence suggest, is corroborated by the work of the German historian Gerhard Wettig. Wettig has examined papers from the Soviet Foreign Ministry, where the March note was apparently conceived and prepared. In many ways Wettig's findings are what historians and others have been waiting for since 1952: primary Soviet evidence on the Stalin note. In addition to revealing the origins of the Stalin note, the Foreign Ministry archive also yields various *justifications* (to Stalin as well as to other Soviet-bloc governments) for this initiative. This evidence is especially revealing in three aspects: the reasons behind the initial idea that Moscow try something new on the German question; the explanation of what kind of initiative was needed and how it ought to be formulated; and the true objective of the March 10 note itself. In light of its significance, an extensive summary of Wettig's article is appropriate.

The idea for a new Soviet move on Germany originated with M. Gribanov, the foreign ministry's chief for German-speaking countries. In February 1951, and again in August of that year, Gribanov tried to convince Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko that the Soviet Union needed to take "a real step toward a peace arrangement with Germany," in order to thwart "the false

⁷⁹ ZP, NL 36/696. For a slightly different translation, as well as an excerpt from the Soviet version of the same meeting, see *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 4 (Fall 1994), 34-35, 48-49.

⁸⁰ See Markus Kiefer, "Die Reaktion auf die 'Stalin-Noten' in der zeitgenössischen deutschen Publistik: Zur Widerlegung einer Legende," *Deutschland Archiv* 22:1 (1989), 56-76.

statement of the three [Western] powers on ending the state of war with Germany."⁸¹ Gribanov did not argue that the Soviet Union seek constructive talks with the West, but rather advocated a propaganda move *against* the West.

In late 1951 or January 1952, the central figure in the drafting of the Soviet initiative, Andrei Gromyko, illuminated for Stalin the kind of initiative under preparation at the foreign ministry: an appeal to German public opinion in a diplomatic guise. The Deputy Foreign Minister also explained how an initiative of this kind ought to be written:

[I]n diplomatically phrased appeals, meant to direct "the attention of the German people" toward "the question of the fight for German unity," it was crucial to be "effective." Decisive here was that the Western powers would be given no opportunities which they could "use to our detriment."

The West would get such opportunities, Gromyko argued, if Moscow submitted a clearly phrased proposal for a peace treaty.⁸² What this means, again, is: we are not interested in serious talks with the West, all we want to do is stir up West German public opinion. For this reason Gromyko objected at various points in the drafting process of the Stalin-note—with the obvious consent of his superiors—to language that clearly indicated what Moscow opposed or favored, since this would give the West an opportunity to pin the Soviet government down:

The central question around which the fight of the democratic German forces ought to evolve [is] the question of the conclusion of a peace treaty, the withdrawal of the occupying forces, and the question of all-German elections with the objective of a united, democratic, and peaceful Germany.⁸³

What was needed was a positive message, rather than a statement of actual Soviet objectives. The latter, naturally, Stalin *did* receive from his deputy foreign minister, and its contrast with what was to be put out for public consumption is glaring. A Soviet note to the Western powers containing a vague-sounding proposal for a peace treaty with Germany, Gromyko wrote,

⁸¹ Gerhard Wettig, "Die Deutschland-Note vom 10. März 1952 auf der Basis diplomatischer Akten des russischen Außenministeriums: Die Hypothese des Wiedervereinigungsangebots," *Deutschland Archiv* 26:7 (1993), 792.

Even this kind of evidence has not stopped the debate, although it now does seem to be moving into the area of GDR history (particularly the question to what extent the leftward turn by SED leadership in July 1952 was a direct result of the failure of Stalin's March initiative) rather than continuing to address the "missed opportunity" thesis: Jochen Laufer, "Die UdSSR, die SED und die deutsche Frage. Überlegungen zum Aufsatz Gerhard Wettigs im *Deutschland Archiv* Heft 7/1993," *Deutschland Archiv* 26:10 (1993), 1201-1210; Elke Scherstjanoi, "Zur aktuellen Debatte um die Stalin-Note 1952," *Deutschland Archiv* 27:2 (1994), 181-185; Gerhard Wettig, "Neue Gesichtspunkte zur sowjetischen März-Note von 1952?," *Deutschland Archiv* 27:4 (1994), 416-421; Elke Scherstjanoi, "Die DDR im Frühjahr 1952. Sozialismuslösung und Kollektivisierungsbeschluss in sowjetischer Perspektive," *Deutschland Archiv* 27:4 (1994), 354-363.

⁸² Gromyko to Stalin, 21 January 1952 at the latest, Archive of Foreign Policy, Russian Federation (AVPRF), fond 07, opis' 25, delo 100, papka 13, A-124/ag (appendix), quoted in Wettig, "Die Deutschland-Note vom 10. März 1952 auf der Basis diplomatischer Akten des russischen Außenministeriums," 795.

⁸³ Gromyko to Stalin, 21 January 1952 at the latest, quoted in *ibid.*, 799; see also 796-798.

would have great political meaning for the reinforcement of the fight for peace and against the remilitarization of West Germany and would help the proponents of German unity and peace to dissect the aggressive objectives of the three Western powers that are connected with the "General Treaty."⁸⁴

We *talk* about peace and unity, Gromyko says in these messages, but our *objective* is to disrupt West Germany's remilitarization and attainment of sovereignty. This is also the explanation the foreign ministry prepared for the comrades in Warsaw and Prague. Moscow's and East Berlin's campaign against Western integration of the Federal Republic, a draft message reads, had been inadequate. The Stalin note was to provide political circles in the GDR and West Germany the means to wage

a similar campaign in the press and among the German population against the aggressive policy of the three powers toward West Germany that was aiming for its integration with the aggressive plans of the Atlantic bloc.⁸⁵

Wettig's conclusions are inevitable: the Stalin note was not meant to elicit a positive response from the West.⁸⁶ At no place in the foreign ministry papers he cites did any of the Soviet policymakers involved formulate a constructive objective for Soviet German policy—not even a hypothetical best-case scenario describing German unification exclusively on Soviet terms. The emphasis Gromyko placed on immediate publication of Soviet and East German diplomatic initiatives shows that, in Wettig's words, *es kam [...] entscheidend auf die Publizität an* (propaganda was the essence).⁸⁷ Achieving German unification was not Stalin's goal; Moscow was not even thinking of unification solely on *Soviet* terms when it prepared and released the March 10 note. Rather, the Soviets hoped to use the issue as a last effort to undermine West German remilitarization and rehabilitation as a member of the EDC. This West German integration, if successful, would mean a serious setback for the Soviet Union in its conflict with the West, and it is in this larger Cold War context that the Stalin initiative was taken. Moscow's options at this point were few, not many; its confidence shrinking, not strong; its motive disruption, not reconstruction; confrontation, not compromise. Finally, Moscow's geographical focus was all of (divided) Europe, not just Germany. With the Stalin note the Soviet Union waged the Cold War, rather than seeking its amelioration.

⁸⁴ Gromyko to Stalin, 21 January 1952, AVPRF, fond 082, opis' 40, delo 11, papka 225, E-1-1a/Ge, quoted in *ibid.*, 798.

⁸⁵ Proekt pis'ma pol'skomu praviti'stvu, n.d., cited in *ibid.*, 799.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 802. This modifies Graml's conclusion (see n. 28) in the sense that consolidation of the GDR was perhaps a secondary, but not the primary Soviet objective. The decision for consolidation, Wettig has recently argued, came later. See, "Die beginnende Umorientierung der sowjetischen Deutschland-Politik im Frühjahr und Sommer 1953," *Deutschland Archiv* 28:5 (1995), 495-507.

Acheson, Adenauer, and West German Public Opinion

We now turn to the West's response to the Stalin note, the second pillar of Steininger's argument. How did the West view the Soviet initiative, how did Adenauer see it, and what was the chancellor's influence on the Western response to Stalin?

In his 1985 study, Steininger demonstrated that at several points during the exchange of notes with Moscow, influential Western officials were willing to have talks with Moscow. During these talks, it was widely expected, the Soviets would reject the Western conditions for German reunification and thereby demonstrate to international public opinion, especially West German public opinion, which side was blocking progress. We will focus on the two major instances where, according to Steininger, Adenauer prevented his allies from actually proposing a four-power meeting: in March immediately following the first Stalin note, and in late April and early May, when Secretary of State Acheson in a draft reply to the second Soviet note proposed that the four powers meet at the High Commissioner level to discuss the possibilities for free, all-German elections.

A British Foreign Office memorandum by W.D. Allen of March 11, included in Steininger's book, contains the following passage:

consideration should perhaps also be given to the possibility of agreeing to a meeting at an early stage in the hope of showing reasonably quickly that agreement cannot be reached and thus enabling our negotiations with the German Federal Government [about West German participation in the European Defence Community and the further dismantling of the occupation regime] to proceed. But such a course would clearly be hazardous. It is most unlikely that the United States Government would agree to it.⁸⁸

The U.S. government indeed rejected this idea, as did the British, even though the U.S. State Department's Policy Planning Staff in a memorandum of March 18 believed that it might be better to have a meeting with the Soviets instead of replying in writing.

We are in a better position to attach conditions to agreement to discuss an election now than we will be after the Russian rejoinder. If these conditions are sufficiently rigorous and if their political implications for the Russian position in East Germany are made plain, S/P [Policy Planning Staff] believes that we will be able to show that the Russians were bluffing. In this event we would be able to proceed full steam with the EDC and would have convinced many fence-sitters that German unity is not a real alternative to the EDC.⁸⁹

⁸⁸ *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 46-51, 117.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 51-52, 158.

For his part, Adenauer did not want a four-power conference, not even to expose a Soviet bluff. At a meeting with the Western High Commissioners on March 11 he declared that the Stalin-note would not change his policy.⁹⁰ At this meeting as well as at the next one, on March 17, the chancellor was in complete agreement with the Western representatives in rejecting a four-power conference: "the objective of the Soviets," he said on the 17th, "clearly is only to disturb or at least slow down the efforts at integration through a conference that goes on forever."⁹¹ Neither Adenauer nor the British, French, or Americans were interested in exploring the Soviet offer. Not only did the Western governments reject serious negotiations about German unification, they did not even want to have a conference for tactical reasons, at least not during the initial stage of the exchange of notes when the uncertainty about Soviet motives was greatest and the EDC and the German General Treaty still needed to be signed.

Steininger faulted Adenauer for not putting pressure on the West to explore the Soviet proposal. By demanding that Stalin be taken up on his offer, Steininger argues, the chancellor could have set negotiations in motion. Because he did not do so, the West lacked any incentive to talk to Moscow.⁹² In the light of the British and American evidence Steininger himself provided, this is a best a questionable proposition. It is also ahistorical to claim that Adenauer in March 1952 could have performed a complete about-face two months before the policy he had pursued since 1949—striving for West German sovereignty, equality, and Western integration—would bear fruit in the German General Treaty and the EDC treaty.⁹³

The Western powers certainly took Adenauer's views and those of other West Germans into account, for, West German integration with the West being their aim, they wanted to avoid the impression that the Western position was being decided against West Germany's will or over its head. Secretary of State Dean Acheson, for example, wrote on April 30 that the West ought to be careful

not to present [its European integration policy] as a policy which the three Powers have formulated and are insisting upon, but rather as a policy of the FedRep and other Eur countries which we (US and UK) support. ... Believe this point important as many Gers tend to feel we are forcing Ger down path of our choosing.⁹⁴

⁹⁰ Ibid., 43; Adenauer, *Erinnerungen*, vol. II, 70. On the same day in Washington, West German State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Walter Hallstein told Acheson that "he was certain that the Moscow note would have no effect whatever on the Chancellor or the government. ... In his opinion the only question before us was the matter of the proper tactical handling of the note so as to get the best advantage from our reply in Germany." Dean Acheson Papers, Harry S. Truman Library, Box 67: Memoranda of Conversations, January-July 1952.

⁹¹ Protocol of the meeting of 19 March 1952, Schwarz, *Adenauer und die hohen Kommissare II*: 1952, 27.

⁹² *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 34.

⁹³ See also Henning Köhler, *Adenauer. Eine Politische Biographie* (Frankfurt: Propyläen, 1994), 683.

⁹⁴ Acheson to U.S. Embassy in Great Britain, *FRUS*, 1952-1954, 7:218. See also cable from U.S. High Commissioner for Germany, John McCloy, to the State Department, 11 March 1952, in Steininger, *Eine Chance*

When the Western powers were discussing their reply to the second Soviet note (9 April 1952), Acheson had come to believe that for this reason the West ought to take the initiative on four-power talks.⁹⁵

Since talks of some sort are probably necessary, it is therefore desirable to take the initiative in proposing them in order to convince Gers we mean business and are not afraid to talk, and to control level, substance and timing of talks.⁹⁶

Why did the Secretary think this was so important?

It is in our interest to expose Sov insincerity at earliest possible date and in any event before [the European EDC ratification] legislative debates are concluded. ... If Sovs are really prepared to open Eastern Zone, we should force their hand. We can *not* allow our plans to be thwarted merely by *speculation* that Sovs may be ready actually to pay a high price.⁹⁷

Most of all, as these words show, Acheson wanted to ensure that the West Germans believed that the Western powers were acting in their interests. This initiative was meant both to reassure the West Germans and to get their support. What was Adenauer's role in this episode?

Initially, Adenauer was favorably inclined toward the idea. He told McCloy on 2 May 1952 that a meeting limited to a discussion of conditions permitting free elections in Germany "would be helpful in persuading public opinion [that the] Western allies [are] sincere in their desire to bring about Ger[man] unity on conditions acceptable to [the] Ger[man] people."⁹⁸ Twenty-four hours later, however, he had changed his mind:

Chancellor told me today that after serious consideration yesterday and 'through half the night', he had definitely concluded US proposal for meeting in Berlin ... would be a mistake at this time. If meeting is now ... suggested, Chancellor doubts

zur iedervereinigung?, 118, n1; McCloy to Secretary of State Dean Acheson, 12 March 1952, *ibid.*, 122, 123; McCloy to Acheson, 16 March 1952, *ibid.*, 150; British Charge d'Affaires in Washington C. Steel to F. Roberts, Foreign Office, 3 April 1952, *ibid.*, 186; Acheson to U.S. Embassy in London, 30 April 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:218. Aside from this, the Americans also believed that they needed to educate the Germans sternly. On 21 April 1952, Acheson wrote McCloy that there was no guarantee that Western integration would bring reunification, but that the Germans needed to understand that without the West, it was even less likely to occur. Accepting the Soviet offer would jeopardize everything for the Germans. Quoted in Rupieper, *Der besetzte Verbündete*, 265, 266.

⁹⁵In a draft reply to the second Soviet note, dated 30 April 1952, the State Department included the following point after stating that the United States was willing to try everything in order to reach agreement on free, all-German elections. "It is accordingly prepared to authorize the US High Commissioner in Germany or a representative designated by him to discuss with his colleagues in Ger representing the Govts of the UK, France and the Sov Union, the possibility of arranging for an impartial Comm. to carry out the necessary investigation in all of Ger." *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:222.

⁹⁶Note accompanying State Department's draft reply to the second Soviet note, *ibid.*, 218, 219.

⁹⁷*Ibid.*, 219.

⁹⁸McCloy to State Department, 2 May 1952, *ibid.*, 220.

that Cabinet would authorize him to sign contractual agreements until meeting had demonstrated whether Soviets sincere in their offer of free elections.⁹⁹

Steininger concluded that "this rejection was a historical decision ... If Adenauer had accepted the American offer, the Foreign Office and Quai d'Orsay, where Acheson's proposal had encountered opposition, would have had to agree."¹⁰⁰

This, again, is questionable. First, it is hard to say how London and Paris would have reacted had Adenauer agreed to the American proposal. We do know that both British Foreign Minister Anthony Eden and the French and British High Commissioners in Germany had decided by May 2 that Acheson's proposal was unwise. The British High Commissioner told McCloy that in case of a four-power meeting the Bundestag might prevent the treaties from being signed in May. His French colleague said he feared that the Soviet Union would slow down a four-power meeting to prevent the ratification of the treaties. Both agreed, however, that talks would be a good hint to the (West) Germans that a return to an Allied Control Commission regime was still a real alternative to integration with the West: one more indication that gaining the support of West German public opinion was foremost in the minds of Western policymakers.¹⁰¹ Eden also changed his mind after initially favoring Acheson's idea.¹⁰² Hermann Graml has taken great pains to point out that the British and French rejection of Acheson's proposal reached Washington before McCloy's despatch of May 3 reporting on Adenauer's change of mind. Therefore, Graml concluded, Adenauer did not influence the decision to evade four-power talks before the signing of the treaties, although he might have, had he changed his mind earlier. That Steininger nevertheless called the chancellor's decision "historical," Graml found "inexplicable."¹⁰³ Hermann-Josef Rupieper has also corrected Steininger, although in a less polemical way: "The State Department could not prevail in the face of the common opposition of the British and the French, also because the Committee [for the drafting of the Western replies, meeting in London] too was informed of Adenauer's change of mind and [Berlin] mayor [Ernst] Reuter also objected to a meeting of the

⁹⁹McCloy to Acheson, 3 May 1952, Steininger, *Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 241.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, 63.

¹⁰¹McCloy to State Department, 2 May 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:223, 224. McCloy himself also saw four-power talks in this light. Talks could "clearly demonstrate the insincerity of the Sov offer," he wrote. German opposition to the EDC and General Treaties had "not been stimulated by Sov offer," he believed, but was "inherent in the terms of the contracts themselves." One could say that the West Germans, although not enthusiastic about the Soviet proposal, displayed, in Thomas Schwartz's words, "a paralysis of the political will to act, a fear of doing anything that might jeopardize future reunification." *America's Germany*, 264. See also note 94.

¹⁰²U.S. ambassador Walter Gifford to Department of State, London, 3 May 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:225. Eden, Gifford wrote, had done so after reconsidering the issue by himself, and after having received the views of his High Commissioner in Germany.

¹⁰³*Die Märznote*, 55.

victorious powers."¹⁰⁴ If there was a historical decision in early May 1952, it was a combined British, French, and German one, one, moreover, the Americans accepted quite easily.

During the spring and summer of 1952, the Soviet Union, the Western powers, and Adenauer were all vying for West German public opinion.¹⁰⁵ Seen in this light, Acheson's idea of April 30 was mainly a suggestion to aid in the battle for public opinion, as the Western officials sought means to wage the propaganda battle with Moscow most effectively. This was what the exchange of notes was about. In March and April, Adenauer led an intensive campaign to rally support for his policies. He held speeches, wrote articles and gave interviews, and on April 12 declared that for him the essence of the exchange with the Soviet Union was "a propaganda battle for the Western treaties."¹⁰⁶ In this context, it is conceivable that in early May, like Eden and Acheson, Adenauer considered the option of proposing four-power talks. His goal was identical to Acheson's: preventing Soviet manipulation of the unification issue to disrupt the Federal Republic's integration with the West.¹⁰⁷ Four-power talks of some kind were never completely ruled out by Acheson, Eden, or McCloy either, although these officials never considered the kind of talks Steininger has advocated. As Eden's views were transmitted to Washington on April 17:

We must so handle Sov note as to encourage Ger not only to sign but also to ratify these agreements. This means we must be careful not to shut door on Four-Power discussions and on reunification of Ger.¹⁰⁸

Acheson, cabling to the U.S. Embassy in London the next day, agreed. The United States, he emphasized, did not want a Council of Foreign Ministers meeting.

You should, however, discuss relative advantages and disadvantages of proposing possible mtg perhaps of reps of HICOMs to discuss use of UN comm by four

¹⁰⁴*Der besetzte Verbündete*, 271.

¹⁰⁵West German public opinion was suspicious of both the Stalin note and the Western treaties. But the distrust of the Soviet Union was stronger. Regarding the Western treaties, West Germans mostly feared that these would make unification more difficult. Hermann-Josef Rupieper writes: "Public opinion polls of the spring of 1952 clarify a trend and may have strengthened policymakers in their conviction that a majority of the population of the Federal Republic would probably opt for the West, even though the battle for the Germans had not been won definitively." *Der besetzte Verbündete*, 269. See also Knud Dittmann, *Adenauer und die deutsche Wiedervereinigung: Die politische Diskussion des Jahres 1952* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1981); Markus Kiefer, "Die Reaktion auf die 'Stalin-Noten' in der zeitgenössischen deutschen Publizistik"; and Peter März, *Die Bundesrepublik zwischen Westintegration und Stalin-Noten: Zur deutschlandpolitische Diskussion 1952 in der Bundesrepublik vor dem Hintergrund der westlichen und der sowjetischen Deutschlandpolitik* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1982).

¹⁰⁶Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der Aufstieg, 1876-1952* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1986), 919. See also for the development of the chancellor's thinking between March 10 and 21, *ibid.*, 909-913. For Adenauer's speeches, writings, and interviews from these weeks, see Graml, "Die Legende von der verpaßten Gelegenheit," 321, 322.

¹⁰⁷To McCloy on 12 April 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:203-206.

¹⁰⁸U.S. ambassador in London, Gifford, to Department of State, 17 April 1952, *FRUS, 1952-1954*, 7:209.

powers to determine existence of conditions permitting free elections. ... We can see some advantages in a mtg at that level which might expose Sov sham.¹⁰⁹

In order to ensure West German support for their policies, the Western powers partly relied on Adenauer for advice and support. As the previous two years had shown, Adenauer could both tell them how their policies would be received in the Federal Republic and, because his own objectives were so similar to theirs, help them achieve their aims.¹¹⁰ This is why Acheson in his message of April 30 emphasized that Adenauer be consulted on the idea of four-power talks:

Believe you shld keep clearly before your colleagues need for real consultation with Adenauer and Reuter at earliest possible date. ... Especially desire comments from Bonn as to desirability of proposed talks.¹¹¹

As Acheson said in June, in his eyes the chancellor was the "best judge of Ger[man] opinion."¹¹² Adenauer was never Acheson's only judge, but there is no doubt that the Secretary valued his opinion highly and sought it on his idea of April 30. There should be no misunderstanding, however, about the character of Acheson's idea or about the kind of advice he sought from the West German chancellor. Steininger distorted the issue when he wrote:

If no less a figure than the American Secretary of State made the offer [to test Stalin's intentions]—if only for tactical reasons—then the often cited danger 'to end up in between all chairs' did not exist for the Germans.¹¹³

The four-power talks evidently envisioned by Steininger differ greatly from those Acheson had in mind in 1952. What Adenauer could and should have done during the first days of May 1952,

¹⁰⁹FRUS, 1952-1954, 7:212.

¹¹⁰The relationship between the Western powers and the chancellor was, of course, more complex than this. But the point remains that over time after 1949 a certain amount of mutual understanding and trust had been achieved.

¹¹¹FRUS, 1952-1954, 7:219.

¹¹²To U.S. embassy in France, 19 June 1952, *ibid.*, 272.

One might wonder why in June, with the treaties signed, Acheson so vehemently opposed French and British ideas for a four-power meeting. (see note 58). After all, had he himself not suggested four-power talks on April 30? Why did the Secretary not support his allies, now that they also proposed talks? Had Acheson really been interested in four-power talks he should have sided with the British and the French. The fact that he did not suggests how tentative his April 30 proposal really was. At that time, Acheson was not interested in negotiations with the Soviet Union but merely floated an idea. Faced with British and French objections and being informed about Adenauer's concerns about West German support for the signing of the Western treaties if talks were held, the Secretary made up his mind. In June, he maintained his position, especially because Adenauer told him that in case of four-power talks the Bundestag might delay the ratification of the treaties. In 1974, Geoffrey W. Lewis, Deputy Director of the Office of German Affairs at the State Department at the time, described Adenauer's influence in Washington as follows: "Germany was getting to be an independent nation more and more, and to what extent do [you] interfere? In other words, do you sit in Washington and say, 'Well, I know a hell of a lot more about this than you do, Mr. Chancellor? It's a pretty risky business, particularly when you're dealing with a pretty wise and pretty tough old bird like Adenauer.'" Oral History Interview, Harry S. Truman Library, p. 48.

¹¹³*Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 63.

Steininger seems to believe, was to radically change his policy and take Acheson's idea for exposing "Soviet insincerity at [the] earliest possible date" as an opportunity to advocate serious negotiations about the establishment of a non-aligned, unified Germany modelled on Stalin's March 10 proposal. Not only, Steininger implied, would the U.S. government have supported this, but the French and the British would have been unable to sustain their opposition to talks as well. Here, again, citizen—or advocate—Steininger took over from the historian.

Had West German attitudes, government and public opinion, toward the German national question been different after 1949, had Chancellor Adenauer been more critical toward Western integration and more willing to make reunification his prime objective, the Western powers would have had to take this into account and adjust their policies accordingly.¹¹⁴ But to say that in the spring of 1952 Adenauer could have radically changed his mind without alienating the Western powers—let alone that he should have done so—as Steininger has done, is at best unpersuasive. Adenauer did not decide for the Western powers how they were to respond to Stalin. His role, very conveniently, was that of a loyal ally and consultant. In this role, Adenauer was supported, by and large, by both his cabinet and the Christian Democrats in the Bundestag.¹¹⁵

Adenauer did decide, of course, how his foreign policy was presented to the German people. Was the chancellor serious when he promised the West Germans that integration with the West was the best way to achieve reunification, and did he actually think that reunification was a good thing? Or did he mislead his people because only by holding out the prospect of reunification could he get enough support for his real and perhaps only aim, Western integration, which at the time seemed to make reunification more difficult?¹¹⁶ Before the opening of the East Berlin and

¹¹⁴Hans-Peter Schwarz, "Adenauer und Rußland," in Friedrich J. Kroneck and Thomas Oppermann, eds., *Im Dienste Deutschlands und des Rechtes: Festschrift für Wilhelm G. Grewe zum 70. Geburtstag am 16. Oktober 1981* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 1981), 369-371; Graml, "Nationalstaat oder westdeutscher Teilstaat?," 845.

¹¹⁵See Gerd Bucorius, *Der Adenauer: subjektive Beobachtungen eines unbequemen Weggenossen* (Hamburg, Hoffmann und Campe, 1976), 68-70; and Michael Lemke, "Chance oder Risiko? Die Stalin-Note vom 10. März 1952 im außenpolitischen Konzept der Bundesregierung," *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 39:2 (1991), 115-129. Hermann-Josef Rupieper in the most recent and most thoroughly researched study of U.S.-West German relations during this period emphasizes that the Federal Republic was consulted by the West, but not as an equal partner. The Western powers, he writes, decided Germany's fate and in doing so looked after their own interests first. *Der besetzte Verbündete*, 267; see also Graml, *Die Märznote*, 47-50, and "Die Legende von der verpaßten Gelegenheit," 318.

¹¹⁶Josef Foscaphoth made this argument on the basis of a 1955 British document in which Adenauer is quoted as saying that he opposed reunification because the German people could not be trusted with it. *Adenauer und die deutsche Frage*, 289, 290. We should not make too much of this, as Adenauer probably meant to say that he did not trust the Germans with a non-aligned, unified state—in 1955, as in 1952, the only solution for the German question that the Soviet Union might have accepted. This by no means shows that Adenauer opposed a resolution of the German question of the kind that occurred in 1990.

Moscow archives, German historians focussed more on this issue than on new research on the Stalin-note itself.¹¹⁷

While on the whole Steininger's personal views had the upper hand in his work, the historian made himself heard as well, for example when we read that:

In reality the West strove not for reunification, but to *control* West Germany. As there was no ideal policy for Germany, one had to choose the one with the fewest risks; Western integration of the Federal Republic. ... From the beginning this made the Eastern and Western positions irreconcilable.¹¹⁸

But political advocacy interfered constantly, in this case in a contradictory way:

After reviewing the documents there cannot be any doubt any more that negotiations with the Soviets were possible, even without endangering the Western integration, if only Adenauer had wanted this.¹¹⁹

Once again, this depends on how *negotiations* is understood. In 1952 the Western powers had a different definition of this term than Steininger in 1985. *This* is what the documents show. If upon reception of the Stalin note Adenauer had ceased to be Adenauer and had radically changed his policies to press for serious negotiations with Moscow, the Federal Republic's relations with the West might very well have taken a turn for the worse. The West German position would in such a hypothetical case have been fundamentally different from that of the West.

Steininger's critique of Adenauer concerned the chancellor's entire policy of Western integration, not just his actions of 1952.¹²⁰ The crucial aspect of Adenauer's actions between March and June 1952 was their consistency with his policies since 1949, emphasizing West German sovereignty and Western integration over, and as a precondition for, reunification. When Stalin made his offer, these policies were about to reach a crucial milestone in the EDC and General treaties. How realistic is it to say that the chancellor could, or should, have abandoned all his firmly held beliefs, jeopardized his work of three years, and advocated negotiations with the Soviet Union? Yet, this is one of the two major assumptions that underlay Steininger's argument.

¹¹⁷See, aside from Foschepoth's collection, David P. Calleo, ed., *Geteiltes Land, halbes Land?* (Frankfurt: Ullstein, 1986); Wilhelm G. Grewe, *Die deutsche Frage in der ost-west Spannung* (Herford: Busse-Seewald, 1986); Rudolf Morsey, *Die Deutschlandpolitik Adenauers: Alte Thesen und neue Fakten* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991); Hans-Peter Schwarz, *Adenauer: Der Aufstieg, ... Der Staatsmann, 1953-1967* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags Anstalt, 1991); Weber, *Die Republik der fünfziger Jahren*. Hermann-Josef Rupieper's *Der besetzte Verbündete*, while also contributing to this debate, did contain new research on the Stalin note. A new addition to the debate is Köhler, *Adenauer*.

¹¹⁸*Eine Chance zur Wiedervereinigung?*, 74.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 75. It is either the West having made up its mind from day one, or Adenauer being able to sway them, not both.

¹²⁰See, especially, *ibid.*, 88.

The other, of course, was that there was something to negotiate about with Stalin. There was not.¹²¹ To be sure, the Soviet Union wanted to prevent West German integration with the West, the primary aim of both the Western governments and Adenauer. For the Soviet Union, Germany should not belong to the West; this was the whole point of Stalin's initiative. But no evidence has emerged to show that Stalin indeed believed the GDR and its regime to be expendable. So even if Moscow had been serious about a four power conference—something the documents do not bear out—what would there have been to negotiate about? It appears from Soviet and East German archives that Stalin really saw the GDR as an integral, albeit singular, part of the Soviet Union's East European empire, and that both the dictator and his lieutenants realized that giving it up would have grave consequences for Moscow's position elsewhere in the region.¹²²

For the West, including West Germany, there were two points on which no concessions were possible: free, all-German elections at the beginning of any reunification process, and total freedom for the Germans to join any international organization. It is difficult to see how negotiations could have resolved these fundamental contradictions.¹²³ What they were much more likely to achieve was the disruption of the relatively fragile Western integration process, about to reach an important milestone. All the Western governments realized this danger, and were determined to avert it.

Priorities

It is true that unification was not at the top of the Western agenda in 1952. Internally, American officials were quite blunt about this, for example during the development of a Germany strategy at the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB). During a PSB meeting on 27 March 1952, State Department official Henry Kellerman stated that "German unity was considered to be more of a psychological objective than a realistic political objective."¹²⁴ One week later, one of Kellerman's colleagues was even more candid:

¹²¹Russian historian Alexei Filitov mentions an account, years later, by Vladimir Semyonov, in 1952 political counselor to the Soviet High Commissioner for Germany, of a meeting with Stalin in which the dictator is supposed to have asked whether he could be certain that the Americans would turn down his proposal. Only after Semyonov reassured him Filitov reports, did Stalin give permission for the note to be forwarded. "The Soviet Policy and Early Years of Two German States, 1949-1961," paper prepared for the CWIHP Conference on "Germany and the Cold War," University of Essen, Essen, Germany, June 1994.

¹²²See the Pieck Papers, above; Wettig, "Die Deutschland-Note vom 10. März 1952 auf der Basis diplomatischer Akten des russischen Außenministeriums"; Daniil Melnikow, "Illusionen oder eine verpaßte Chance?," 599; Constantine Pleshakov and Vladislav Zubok, "The Soviet Union," in David Reynolds, ed., *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 64-71. Konrad Adenauer emphasized this last point too: *Adenauer Teegespräche 1950-1954*, 295-303.

¹²³They were fundamental because they reflected what each side perceived as its vital interests. See also Hanrieder, *Deutschland, Europa, Amerika*, 171.

¹²⁴Department of State points on Germany Plan PSB (draft), 27 March 1952, PSB Box 6, Germany File # 1, Harry S. Truman Papers, Harry S. Truman Library.

Mr. [Geoffrey] Lewis said that they [at the State Department] didn't want the unification of Germany right now, but we're stuck with it. So that is the essence of the problem. He thought, for the sake of clarity, we [authors of the PSB's Germany Plan] ought to make clear that we have got a problem and our support for unification is at the moment, a propaganda support really.¹²⁵

With their primary objective (West German integration into the Western alliance) becoming reality after 1952, these American policymakers, as well as their colleagues elsewhere in the West, discovered how difficult it was to pursue simultaneously the second(ary) objective of unification. It would become clear that in many ways the process toward integration—begun, really, between 1946 and 1949 with *Bizonia*, the separate West German currency, and finally the creation of a West German state—precluded (at least for the foreseeable future) the attainment of the unification objective.¹²⁶ It is not clear by any means that the Western governments or Adenauer accepted this fully at the time this process got underway, or that they were indifferent to the fact that integration did not bring unification any closer. And of course, the decision of 1948-1949 was not made in a vacuum; it was accompanied, indeed driven, by continuing East-West paralysis over Germany, a state that had to come to an end one way or another. But it does illustrate that, as Henry Kissinger put it recently:

[i]n retrospect, all international systems appear to have an inevitable symmetry. Once they are established, it is difficult to imagine how history might have evolved had other choices been made or indeed whether any other choices had been possible. When an international order first comes into being, many choices may be open to it. But each choice constricts the universe of remaining options. Because complexity inhibits flexibility, early choices are especially crucial.¹²⁷

In a general sense, the anxieties of spring 1952—in Moscow and East Berlin, and in the Federal Republic and the Western capitals over the EDC and the Stalin-note—also reflected a growing realization that as a result of policies embarked upon during the late 1940s, a certain postwar order in Europe was taking shape, and that as a result of the relative success of these policies, alternative courses of action were becoming ever more difficult to pursue.

But this is mostly hindsight. For when Stalin died, almost exactly one year after the 10 March 1952 note was issued, many in the West believed that there was still room for a negotiated settlement to the division of Europe and Germany, that structures were not firm yet but fluid. The

¹²⁵PSB Germany Plan meeting, *ibid.* Just before Lewis spoke, Kellerman had made the same point: "there is a priority character attached to some of these objectives [listed in the draft under discussion] and secondary weight to others. They [at the State Department] would also like to have integration of Germany before unification is achieved ... integration is what we want first of all, and unification is not a no. 1 priority." *Ibid.*

¹²⁶The other reason, of course, is that, contrary to many people's hopes or expectations, the Soviet Union, with or without Stalin, did not roll over and surrender in the face of Western resolve.

¹²⁷Henry A. Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 27, 28.

division of Europe and Germany still struck many as unnatural and, in the long run, a threat to peace. One could argue that it would take until 1961 and the building of the Berlin Wall for all to realize that although Europe's and Germany's division remained unnatural and immoral, it was also a long-term, even stable, phenomenon. How precisely between 1952 and the end of the decade perceptions of the German division changed—how, in other words, renewed efforts to heal it led to nothing—deserves renewed scholarly attention and analysis, rather than the dubious question of whether "1952" was a "lost opportunity," for it was not.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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