with Moscow. For all the hours the Soviet delegation spent with Tito and his
chief ideologist, Edvard Kardelj, the Yugoslavs had refused to budge on some of
their interpretations. For Molotov, this was reason to give up on close relations
with Belgrade, but for Khrushchev, Mikoyan, Bulganin, and his longtime
patron in the leadership, Lazar Kaganovich, this was acceptable. A new doctrine
of patient pressure was to replace the rejectionism of the Stalin-Molotov foreign
policy. “With confidence,” Khrushchev told his colleagues two days later, “we
must manage things so that we draw Yugoslavia to our side. Step by step we
must strengthen our position. We must show confidence and not allow
defeatism.”

Khrushchev’s and Molotov’s ideological debate would have implications
far beyond the Kremlin’s standoff with Tito. If the Presidium followed Khru­
shchev’s lead and dispensed with the tradition of forcing potential foreign
allies to jump through ideological hoops, then the number of potential
friends for the USSR in the world would more than triple. It was in the devel­
oping world in particular that this shift would reap the greatest rewards. In
the meantime the trip had put Molotov on notice that whatever his formal
position in the government, he was now on the defensive in a struggle with
Khrushchev over the future of Soviet foreign policy.

A week after his return from Belgrade, Khrushchev confirmed his achieve­
ment at a secret plenum of the Central Committee of the CPSU, a biannual
meeting of the three hundred or so members of the Central Committee. He
and Bulganin told the stories of Molotov’s unwarranted attacks on Zhukov
and his uncompromising stand on Yugoslavia.

Khrushchev kept this anti-Molotov diatribe out of the Soviet press, and nei­
ther the British nor the Americans had any significant secret or press sources
in or near enough to the Kremlin to pick up on either the contest between
Khrushchev and Molotov or what it might mean for international security.
Khrushchev’s next foreign policy initiatives would be of a scale and impor­tance, however, that London and Washington could not miss.

The first great power conference since Harry Truman, Clement
Attlee, and Joseph Stalin met at Potsdam in 1945 took place against the
background of Nikita Khrushchev’s effort to wrest control of Soviet for­
eign policy from Vyacheslav Molotov. On May 10, 1955, France, Great
Britain, and the United States invited Khrushchev and Bulganin to meet “at
the summit” in Geneva, Switzerland. Four days earlier the formal occupation
of West Germany had ended, the Federal Republic of Germany was declared,
and it joined NATO as a sovereign state. With West Germany securely within
the Atlantic military alliance, the Eisenhower administration had finally
agreed to the three-power invitation to Moscow. For two years the British, led
by former Prime Minister Winston Churchill, had been pressing Washington
to meet with the Soviets, but the U.S. government had resisted so long as
there was the chance that a high-level meeting with Soviet representatives
might complicate bringing West Germany into NATO.

It would be hard to exaggerate the depth of the defeat for Soviet diplomacy
that had made this invitation possible. Stalin had designed, and Molotov had
loyally implemented, a policy of encouraging the reunification of a neutral
and possibly socialist Germany. In practice, this meant that the Soviet Union
would not recognize West Germany as a separate state, and though the USSR
would be committed to the support of East Germany, that state was to be con­
sidered only a transitional regime before the reunification of the entire coun­
try. After Stalin’s death and as momentum built in Western Europe for
admitting the Federal Republic of Germany into NATO, the Kremlin under
Molotov’s influence pursued a carrot-and-stick approach. Moscow warned the
Atlantic powers that if the West Germans joined NATO, the Soviet bloc would
form its own military alliance and the Kremlin would refuse to participate in
any four-power summit. If the West Germans rejected the Atlantic alliance,
however, the Kremlin promised to support all-German elections with interna­
tional relations, and a European security system and to welcome normalizing relations with the Federal Republic of Germany.

Khrushchev’s last-minute effort to use Soviet policy toward Austria as an incentive to the Germans to reconsider joining NATO had come too late and probably had no chance of success. The remilitarization of West Germany and its entry into NATO appeared to be popular in that country. The West German parliament, the Bundestag, quickly passed laws to start military training for 150,000 young Germans by 1956 and an additional 250,000 eighteen months later.3

The Kremlin’s immediate response to West Germany’s joining NATO suggested that Moscow would be in no mood for a summit. Arguing in Pravda on May 7 that “West Germany [was] being turned into a bridgehead for the deployment of large aggressive forces,” the Soviet Union announced its abrogation of the wartime mutual assistance treaties that Stalin had signed with France and Great Britain.4 It was hardly likely that in the Cold War the French and the British would defend the Soviet Union against an American attack, but Moscow wanted to make a point. The Kremlin also made good on its earlier threat to create an anti-NATO military alliance. On May 14, military representatives from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union met in Warsaw to establish the Warsaw Pact treaty organization.

For all of the Kremlin’s official truculence, however, Khrushchev did not question his conviction that it was in the long-term interest of the Soviet Union to push for better relations with the West. In his mind, the West German decision was the last in a long line of international events almost entirely brought about by Stalin and Molotov’s stupidity. It simply underscored the need for a new approach.

Khrushchev responded by pushing even harder to get the Austrian treaty. Even though it was of little help in keeping West Germany out of NATO, a unified Austria might still play a useful role in the future diplomacy over the German question. At the very least, Moscow would be able to save money by reducing one of its occupation commitments. In early May the Soviets informed their negotiating partners in Vienna that they no longer insisted on maintaining a right to return Soviet forces to Austria in the wake of a collapse of order there. This removed the last real barrier to a four-power agreement ending the ten-year occupation of Austria. The Austrian State Treaty was signed on May 15, 1955.

At the same time, Khrushchev applied pressure to the Soviet Foreign Ministry to come up with a more realistic approach to international disarmament. On May 10, the same day that the summit invitation came from the British Foreign Secretary, Khrushchev met the press lord William Randolph Hearst earlier in 1955, but in his sixteen years as a full member of the Kremlin’s inner circle, Khrushchev really had had few interactions with foreign capitalists. Just as he had thought it important to see Tito as a way of showing the Yugoslavs that Molotov no longer presented the attitudes or objectives of the Soviet Union, so he hoped his appearance at the summit would have the same effect on Eisenhower; Churchill’s successor, Sir Anthony Eden, and the French premier, Edgar Faure.

Western powers, the ministry announced a plan to reduce international tensions by a phased dismantling of the arsenals of the great powers. Calling for reductions in conventional weapons and the size of each country’s armed forces, as well as elimination of all nuclear weapons, the Soviets proposed a two-year schedule to reach these goals, which would include the closing of all overseas bases by the great powers. In addition, as a measure of nuclear disarmament, the Soviets proposed a nuclear test ban, the first time this had been proposed by any nuclear power.5 At this point in the Cold War the Soviets did not seem to rely as heavily on testing for their nuclear program as did the United States. Since their first atomic blast in August 1949, Soviet scientists had conducted only nineteen nuclear tests, compared with sixty tests by U.S. scientists.6

Thus Khrushchev saw the invitation to the summit as a positive development, not as a sign of Soviet weakness. He was eager for a major platform from which he could introduce himself and his new policies to the West. He had met with the press lord William Randolph Hearst earlier in 1955, but in his sixteen years as a full member of the Kremlin’s inner circle, Khrushchev really had had few interactions with foreign capitalists. Just as he had thought it important to see Tito as a way of showing the Yugoslavs that Molotov no longer presented the attitudes or objectives of the Soviet Union, so he hoped his appearance at the summit would have the same effect on Eisenhower; Churchill’s successor, Sir Anthony Eden, and the French premier, Edgar Faure.

The main force behind American preparations for the Geneva Conference was President Dwight Eisenhower. A popular general whose crowning military achievement was the organization of the successful D-day landings in Normandy, Eisenhower had commanded the Western forces that drove into the heart of Germany in 1945. In the frenetic last weeks of the war he had come under pressure to race the Soviets to Berlin, though Hitler’s capital lay a hundred miles inside the agreed-upon Soviet zone and was itself to be divided into four occupation zones. “Why should we endanger the life of a single American or Briton,” Eisenhower had wondered, “to capture areas we will soon be handing over to the Russians?” This decision had earned Eisenhower almost as much respect in the Soviet Union as it had dismay the likes of George C. Patton and British Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery.

As the U.S. commander in occupied Germany Eisenhower developed some understanding of the Soviets. He spent enough time with Soviet commanders, especially his opposite number in the Soviet Army, Marshal Georgi Zhukov, to escape being one of those who viewed Communists as a unified
hostile group. Moreover, on a trip to Moscow in 1945 he had witnessed both
the poverty of the average Soviet citizen and the immense destruction
wrought by the Nazis. Memories of his interactions with Zhukov and of what
he had seen in Moscow forever after served as a check on his accepting exag­
gerated estimates of Soviet power and the Kremlin's willingness to use it.

Once in the White House, Eisenhower discovered that some fellow
Republicans were second-guessing his instincts in foreign policy. The entire
first year of his administration had been taken up with a fight over whether
hard-line members of Eisenhower's own party would strip the presidency of
some of its treaty-making powers. Eisenhower had won that contest, but it had
been a real battle, and he had to rely on help from congressional Democrats. 8

No U.S. president had faced such an extensive mutiny from his congressional
colleagues since Franklin Roosevelt had pushed through the New Deal.

Eisenhower interpreted Stalin's death, which had occurred less than two
months after his inauguration, as a possible turning point in the Cold War,
and despite these serious challenges from within his own party, he looked for
opportunities to relax Cold War tensions. His motives were not simply
humanitarian. Like Khrushchev, an adversary he hardly knew, Eisenhower
was concerned about the cost of perpetual confrontation. Unlike Khrushchev,
Eisenhower came to this conclusion from a belief in small government and
balanced budgets. He was appalled when he saw the amount of money that
the United States was spending on defense. During the Korean War the
annual defense bill had increased from $13.5 billion to nearly $45 billion per
year. 9 Eisenhower's foreign policy strategy, which he called the New Look,
was designed to reduce defense expenditures to $35 billion by relying more
on cost-efficient nuclear weapons than on conventional forces. To avoid the
implication that America was less secure, Eisenhower had his secretary of
state, John Foster Dulles, threaten "massive retaliation" with nuclear forces in
case of any Soviet attempt to invade the United States or any of its allies. The
threat was credible because Eisenhower and Dulles knew that the United
States enjoyed a qualitative and quantitative advantage in nuclear weapons.
Still, Eisenhower also hoped for some disarmament, which could bring
defense expenditures down even more. In the meantime the doctrine of mas­

N ot e v e r y m e m b e r of the Eisenhower administration looked to Geneva
as a welcome opportunity to reduce East-West tension. Secretary of State
Dulles had disliked the idea of a summit when Churchill first raised it in 1953
because he did not want to take the pressure off Moscow. Dulles believed the
Soviet Union was vulnerable enough that under the right circumstances U.S.
policy might force its collapse. 10 "A policy of pressures," he argued, "can
increase the gap between their requirements and their resources [and] lead to
their disintegration." His brother, Director of Central Intelligence Allen
Dulles, was less sure that the USSR would collapse anytime soon, but he did
believe that the Soviet regime was in trouble. Calling the Austrian treaty "the
first substantial concession to the West in Europe since the end of the war,"
Allen Dulles interpreted the new foreign policy coming out of Moscow as a
sign that Soviet leaders understood they were in trouble. 12

This shared confidence that the Soviets were weak inspired a confronta­tional approach to the Geneva summit. Why make any concessions now, the
Dulles brothers believed, when over time the Soviets were only likely to
become more accommodating? As Allen Dulles told a group of journalists
on the eve of the summit, "if tensions are relaxed the Soviets get precisely what
they want—more time." 13 Foster Dulles, the brother who would actually be
taking the trip to Geneva, assumed that at the very least, arguing from
strength would score points for the West in world public opinion. Unlike
Eisenhower, who was focusing on a possible disarmament initiative, the sec­

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Privately Dulles told President Eisenhower that of course, the Soviets
would probably never accept the Eden Plan or anything like it. In making this
point, he stressed East Berlin's emotional and ideological appeal to the new
Soviet leadership. The Soviets, he reported to the National Security Council,
"fear the effect of the loss of control over East Germany on the satellites." 14
Nevertheless, the Eden Plan was useful as a ploy. Since agreements were
unlikely with Communists, Dulles argued, the goal of U.S. policy should be to

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appear conciliatory while making proposals that it could be assumed the Kremlin would reject or could accept only out of weakness.

Eisenhower decided to accept the Eden proposal and Dulles’s strategy without endorsing the view that an agreement with the Soviets was unlikely at Geneva. He was determined not to let the occasion slip by without making one dramatic attempt to alter the climate of world affairs. Some months earlier Eisenhower had formed a blue-ribbon panel, known as the Gaither Committee, to assess Soviet military power and the United States’ ability to defend against surprise attack. The committee reported in February 1955 that U.S. intelligence sources were too weak to draw any firm conclusions: “Estimates of the specific capabilities and immediate intentions of the Soviets have, at their center, only a very small core of hard facts [emphasis in the original].” U.S. estimates were largely based on extrapolations from U.S. defense technologies and assumptions about Soviet manufacturing capabilities. Well aware of this weakness, Eisenhower had been looking for ways to expand U.S. intelligence coverage of Soviet military facilities. One alternative was to rely on a new high-altitude reconnaissance plane being developed by the CIA called the U-2, but U-2 flights would involve violating Soviet airspace, which under international law was an act of war, and Eisenhower worried about the possible consequences. Just before the Geneva Conference, however, Eisenhower was offered a different approach to solving this intelligence problem that involved cooperation instead of confrontation with Moscow. A small group of advisers led by Nelson Rockefeller recommended the reciprocal opening of the skies of both the Soviet Union and the United States to air reconnaissance. By regularly flying planes over each other’s territory both countries would lessen the threat of a surprise attack and possibly create some mutual trust. Eisenhower liked the idea a lot and decided to offer it in Geneva. Information about the president’s personal initiative, which came to be known as the Open Skies proposal, was tightly held within the U.S. delegation and it would come as a surprise to the Soviets in Geneva.

Then, instead of high school, just a smattering of higher education.” He was always trying to prove himself, first, to his patron Lazar Kaganovich in Kiev, then to Stalin himself in Moscow. In the Stalin era Khrushchev had given bloodcurdling speeches, and signed many death warrants. He strove relentlessly to leave no doubt that despite the fact that his manner suggested a far less sophisticated man, he was as tough, as smart, as capable as any man.

The Soviet leader thought of the Soviet Union much as he thought of himself. Khrushchev wanted Moscow to be viewed as the equal of the West, yet he was well aware of the Soviet Union’s weakness relative to the United States. Despite Soviet successes in testing an atomic bomb in 1949 and a hydrogen bomb only four years later, Moscow’s claim to being a nuclear superpower on a par with the United States was little more than posturing. As of May 1955, the Soviet Union had no way of using a nuclear device against any U.S. city. In March 1951 Stalin had established a design bureau in Moscow overseen by V. M. Myasishchev to produce a bomber that could reach the U.S. mainland. To meet this objective, the plane had to have a range, when refueled, of 6,875 to 7,500 miles. A month earlier the U.S. Air Force had authorized production of the first U.S. intercontinental bomber, the B-52 Stratofortress. The first generation of B-52 bomber could fly 7,343 miles when refueled, carrying ten thousand pounds of ordnance at a cruising speed of 523 miles per hour. The new Soviet bomber was intended to keep pace with this new American flying machine.

The Myasishchev-4 (M-4), designated the Bison bomber by NATO, went into serial production in 1954 but was a huge disappointment. It lacked the range to hit American targets because Myasishchev could not devise a reliable method to refuel the plane. At best the M-4 had a combat radius of five thousand miles, too short to reach either U.S. coast from the nearest point of Soviet territory. Despite the Presidium’s hopes, the only creatures in the Western Hemisphere threatened by an M-4 attack were polar bears in Greenland.

The Soviet Navy in 1955 also lacked the capacity to deliver a nuclear strike against Washington. Stalin had promoted the development of submarines, but missile-launching craft were still years from production. The Soviet Union had no aircraft carriers.

With no way to deliver a nuclear weapon to the United States, the only way the Soviets could harm the United States was to damage one of its NATO allies. The same year the M-4 emerged as a failure, the Tupoluv design bureau produced the first Soviet bomber that could reliably attack Ankara, London, and Paris. The Tu16, known to NATO as the Badger bomber, finally
made the Soviet nuclear threat credible in Europe, though these planes were vulnerable to NATO’s antiaircraft defenses.

For these reasons, conventional forces remained the primary source of Soviet power in Europe. The West estimated that the Soviet armed forces had 175 divisions, or about 4.5 million men, in 1955, though not all were believed to be at full strength and some were deployed in Central Asia and the Far East. By contrast, the United States had 20 divisions defending Europe. In divided Germany, the contest was less one-sided. There 400,000 Western allied troops in West Germany faced 300,000 Soviet troops and an estimated 80,000 East German troops in the German Democratic Republic. Yet in a time of war the Soviets could easily draw on their 2 divisions in Hungary and the 21 fully equipped and well-trained divisions that they kept in Poland and the western USSR.

This conventional advantage held no allure for Khrushchev; he had no intention of starting a war with the West. It also meant less to him because it seemed to mean less to the United States. The Eisenhower administration’s policy of massive retaliation bespoke a confidence that the U.S. strategic advantage was sufficient to deter any unwanted Soviet action. It was this confidence that also seemed to have given rise to John Foster Dulles’s belief that the USSR could be bullied into concessions. Khrushchev wanted to undermine that confidence. He understood that the Americans intended to negotiate from a “position of strength,” and that could only harm Soviet interests.

In preparation for Geneva, Khrushchev tried to alter the psychological climate of the Cold War. From reading U.S. newspapers in translation, he saw evidence that Washington did not understand the deficiencies of the new M-4 long-range bombers and might be vulnerable to some Soviet exaggeration. A controversy had broken out in the U.S. capital in mid-May 1955 over what U.S. Air Force officers believed they had seen at a rehearsal for the Soviet Union’s May Day air show. The actual show had had to be canceled on account of poor weather, but at the rehearsal Americans overcounted the number of M-4s in the Soviet arsenal. Because the Americans assumed the plane met all the performance specifications that Moscow had assigned it, the conclusion was that the Soviets had a reliable nuclear attack force that could reach U.S. cities.

The Kremlin watched with glee as a very helpful discussion of Soviet bomber technology subsequently broke into the open in the United States. Led by Missouri Senator Stuart Symington, a former secretary of the air force under Truman with presidential ambitions, some congressmen began decrying a strategic “bomber gap” between the United States and the Soviet Union.

“It is now clear,” said Symington, “that the United States, along with the rest of the free world, may have lost control of the air.” Despite assurances from the Eisenhower administration that the U.S. Air Force remained ahead of the Soviets, some journalists and legislators began throwing around extravagant assumptions about the capabilities of the M-4. Commentators from both political parties took joy in parsing whether the administration meant that the United States held a lead in total air capability or in what everyone most cared about, the bombers that could reach across oceans.

On May 19, as this controversy was playing out on the front pages of major American newspapers, Bulganin and Zhukov were given the task of preparing a major air show for Soviet Aviation Day on July 13. The country’s entire fleet of three or four M-4s was to be flown in wide circles around Tushino Airport to convey the impression that the Soviet Union had at least twenty-eight of them. If this stunt worked, then in Geneva the Western leaders might treat the Soviet Union as an equal and stop trying to play on its weaknesses.

Meanwhile Khrushchev took advantage of a courtesy invitation from Ambassador Bohlen to attend the U.S. Embassy’s annual Fourth of July reception. Since diplomatic relations had been established between the United States and the USSR in 1934, no Soviet leader had ever stepped foot inside Spaso House, the beautiful New Empire–style residence of the American ambassador that had been built for a Russian merchant in 1914. The presence of seven of the nine members of the Presidium, led by Khrushchev and Bulganin, was an impressive demonstration of the Soviet desire to change the tone of relations. Khrushchev also wanted to send a message to the Eisenhower administration, especially Secretary Dulles, that he was well aware that Washington believed the Kremlin could be pushed around. He told the gathering that he had read some Western press speculation that the foreign policy moves of the new leadership were being made out of weakness. “Of course, we made these proposals not for the purpose of pleasing somebody,” he said. “We made these decisions because they were the right decisions and this is what motivated us.” Khrushchev assured his listeners that the Soviet Union was as strong as it needed to be and it just wanted peace.

He backed his words with action. A few days later the Kremlin made an unprecedented offer regarding a recent military incident. On June 23 two Soviet MiG fighters had fired on a U.S. Navy patrol plane over international waters in the Bering Strait. This was not the first time that the Soviet Air Force had attacked a U.S. plane in the Cold War. What was unprecedented was that after Khrushchev’s and Bulganin’s appearance at Spaso House the Soviets offered to pay half the damages for the incident, which had caused the pilot to bring the plane down. The Eisenhower administration immediately announced that it would not accept the offer, but said that it could serve as a negotiating point at Geneva.
crippled plane in for a hard landing on St. Lawrence Island. Seven of the crew had been injured in the incident. Molotov made the offer to Secretary Dulles on behalf of the Soviet government at a UN meeting in San Francisco.

Behind the scenes, Khrushchev also maneuvered to set the right tone within the Soviet government before Geneva. Molotov, who had been flying back from a UN meeting, had been unable to attend the July 4 reception at the U.S. Embassy. When he returned, Khrushchev used a discussion of a new Soviet declaration on the German question to be sure his foreign minister understood that Moscow would have to speak more softly to create a more peaceful world. Molotov had just submitted a draft declaration on the German question for his colleagues' approval. It repeated the stale Stalinist assertion that only a unified, neutral Germany would be acceptable to the Soviet Union. "The declaration is no good," Khrushchev complained. "The language is quarrelsome, [like] a bludgeon." Bulganin agreed: "The document is dry. . . . Comrade Molotov, you did not catch the tone." The draft was rejected, and Molotov had to come up with something better.

Molotov's draft was in response to some incendiary comments made by Foster Dulles. At a press conference on June 28 the secretary of state had goaded the Kremlin. He said that Moscow had "lost interest in the reunification of Germany" and established Soviet readiness to discuss this issue as the litmus test of the new regime's commitment to reducing international tensions.

Dulles had hit on a weak point in existing Soviet strategy. The Soviet Union's rhetorical commitment to all-German elections and reunification made little sense when East Germany's population was less than seventeen million and shrinking and West Germany's population was over fifty million and growing. Khrushchev understood this but as yet had no sense of how to change the Soviet position. His unwavering commitment was to protect East Germany, yet he hoped to use the four-power system to bring about some disarmament in Central Europe.

The public statement that was carried by the official Soviet news agency TASS on July 12 betrayed the muddiness of the Kremlin's collective thinking on what to do next about Germany. It was clearest at the start, where Dulles's views were attacked as wrongheaded. "This matter is being represented in such a way as if the Soviet Union had lost interest in the unification of Germany, and that, allegedly, the Soviet Union sees a threat to its security in the unification of Germany." The Kremlin's reply was simple: "Everyone knows that the Soviet Union has invariably given first place to the question of Germany's reunification." But from here the way forward became opaque. If a united, free, and democratic Germany was not possible in the short term, then Moscow believed that reunification might be achieved on a "step-by-step" basis "in accordance with the establishment of an all-European system of collective security." Nowhere did the Kremlin state how that phased approach could be reconciled with the self-determination of the German people. Also left unstated was the Soviet hope that at Geneva the Kremlin could somehow convince the other occupying powers to accept European disarmament and a twenty-six-nation European collective security agreement, not German reunification, as the best first step toward détente.

Khrushchev had little hope of achieving anything with Dulles but was optimistic that he might find some common understanding with the head of the American delegation. Khrushchev had met Eisenhower only once, in June 1945, when the supreme allied commander visited Moscow, but he thought he had reason to believe that if there were to be any progress toward détente at Geneva, it would be because of Eisenhower. He knew that Marshal Zhukov had worked closely with Eisenhower in occupied Berlin in 1945. Their personal interaction in those early postwar months had been positive and mutually rewarding. Zhukov liked Eisenhower, and when it became apparent that the United States would be including the secretary of defense in its delegation, Khrushchev made sure that Zhukov not only joined the Soviet group but would be afforded opportunities to meet privately with the American president.

Nikita Khrushchev's insecurities were triggered immediately upon his arrival in Switzerland on Sunday, July 17. As his official plane was taxing to the terminal, he noticed that every other leader, particularly President Eisenhower, had flown to Geneva in a much larger plane than his. In 1955 Air Force One was a 113-foot-long Super Constellation, a plane built by Lockheed that could carry 60 people and fly four thousand miles. Dubbed Columbine III, the presidential plane bore the name of the state flower of Mamiie Eisenhower's home state of Colorado. In comparison, Khrushchev's 73-foot, 30-passenger Ilyushin 14 looked, as he later complained to his son, "like an insect." (After his return Khrushchev needled his civilian aircraft designers to provide him with an official plane that befitted a world power. Once they finally delivered the 177-foot 220-passenger Tu-114 four years later, Khrushchev showed his pride not only by flying around in this behemoth, which stood 50 feet off the ground, but by prominently displaying a scale model of the plane on his desk in the Kremlin.)

At the conference, which started in Geneva's elegant Palais des Nations on
July 18, Khrushchev found other ways to puff himself up. Although Bulganin as Soviet premier was the formal leader of Moscow delegation, Khrushchev acted as Bulganin’s superior and left no doubt that he expected to be treated as the top man.9 Khrushchev was quickly and favorably impressed when Eisenhower suggested that all the leaders meet informally for cocktails between the formal working sessions and the dinners. Evidently the American believed in the value of getting to know his Soviet adversaries and would treat them as equals. Khrushchev also noted that Eisenhower put great store in the chance to renew his acquaintance with Defense Minister Zhukov.

But not everything he saw as the conference opened improved Khrushchev’s image of the American president. The chairmanship of the meeting rotated among the four delegations. When it was Eisenhower’s turn to gavel the meeting to order, Dulles sat at his left elbow. In front of the entire group, Dulles fed Eisenhower handwritten notes, which Khrushchev determined the president was simply reading into the microphone without taking a moment to absorb them himself. “It was difficult for us to imagine how a chief of state could allow himself to lose face like that in front of delegations from other countries,” Khrushchev later recalled. “It certainly appeared that Eisenhower was letting Dulles do his thinking for him.”90

Khrushchev still held hope for the meeting between the two military men. In the early 1960s he would use back channels to express his inner concerns to the Kennedy White House. At this stage he intended to use Zhukov, a man he believed Eisenhower trusted. “[W]e thought their acquaintance,” Khrushchev explained, “… would lead to an easing of the tension between our countries.”91 The meeting between the U.S. president and the Soviet defense minister on July 20 was to be the most honest interaction between representatives of the superpowers in the first decade of the Cold War.32

Zhukov did not mince words. He told Eisenhower of his fears that “dark forces” in the West were attempting to undermine Soviet-American relations, and he blamed these forces for drawing a false picture of the Kremlin as being intent on launching an aggressive war against the United States. On the contrary, Zhukov assured Eisenhower, the Soviet people were “fed up to the teeth with war,” and “no one in the Soviet Government or the Central Committee of the Party had any such intentions.” The essence of Khrushchev’s political agenda, he said, was to improve the Soviet economy and to raise the standard of living of the Soviet people. War would be inimical to that end.13

Eisenhower did not debate Zhukov. He agreed with Zhukov’s description of the intent of Soviet policy. His “entire experience in Berlin with Marshal Zhukov had led him to place credence” in what Zhukov had told him.34

Zhukov then explained why the Soviets had so many armed forces at the ready. Soviet intelligence occasionally forwarded warnings to the leadership of the “readiness of [NATO] to annihilate the Soviet Union from bases located close to the Soviet frontiers.” Under those circumstances, Zhukov explained, Moscow had to be prudent. He reminded Eisenhower that they both had seen their countries fall victim to vicious surprise attacks in 1941. Six months before the Japanese hit Pearl Harbor, the Soviets had been invaded by the Nazis. “These armaments,” Zhukov explained, “of course, were a burden on the Soviet economy, but [the Soviets did] not wish a repetition of 1941, and no more than the United States could afford to play fast and loose with their security.”35

Zhukov “urged” Eisenhower to take his word “as a soldier” that the Soviet Union wanted relief from this military standoff. He argued that the two countries “should work very seriously towards a détente.” He was hopeful that despite the fact that the United States was “a rich country,” America similarly welcomed “a relief from the armaments burden.”36

Eisenhower responded energetically. Like Zhukov, he assumed that responsible leaders in both countries opposed war. Nevertheless, Eisenhower also believed that the Cold War was as much a psychological phenomenon as a clash of interests. Careful not to seem too disparaging of the U.S. Congress or the American press in a meeting with a Soviet (recent leaks of documents surrounding the Yalta Conference were a reminder that such diplomatic documents do not stay secret for long), Eisenhower tried to explain the role of public opinion in restraining the U.S. government in moving toward détente. He cautioned Zhukov not to expect an improvement “overnight.” It would “take some time until the present psychological state of distrust and fear were overcome.”

The meeting continued over lunch, where the U.S. president became more expansive. When the Soviet marshal explained that putting an end to the polemics in Soviet and American statements might be a good first step, Eisenhower explained the limits on his presidential power. Khrushchev could control Pravda, but as president Eisenhower could control only one of the three branches of government in Washington and none of the press. “What was necessary,” Eisenhower said, “were some events or series of events which might change the psychological climate.”

Zhukov argued for the simultaneous dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and NATO. In their place he suggested an all-Europe security system. Here the two men did not attempt to resolve their differences over whether to describe a Communist Poland as a free country or one under Soviet military occupation.

Without revealing his hand, Eisenhower tested Zhukov’s reaction to the Open Skies proposal. He asked what Zhukov thought of an inspection system
of large installations such as airfields, long-range bombers and guided missile factories [that] could not be hidden.” When Zhukov indicated he liked the idea, Eisenhower carefully asked if such an idea would be “politically possible in the Soviet Union.” Zhukov’s response could not have been clearer. “[I]t would be entirely possible and while its detail should be studied, he was, in principle, in full agreement with the President’s remarks.” Zhukov said he understood that this inspection would be a guarantee against surprise attack.37

Eisenhower emerged from this reunion of wartime friends understandably confident that his Open Skies proposal could be the catalyst that would start changing the psychological climate. What he did not yet know was that in supporting an inspection system that could spot large installations, the Soviet marshal had been speaking for himself, not for his boss.

Khrushchev was furious when he heard the details of Eisenhower’s Open Skies proposal at the next day’s formal session. It was impossible for him to accept an inspection that preceded disarmament. If he allowed U.S. planes to spy on every Soviet airfield, Washington would quickly discover that his country was a nuclear paper tiger.

The Open Skies proposal created a rift between Zhukov and Khrushchev. The two men disagreed over whether transparency increased or decreased the threat of a U.S. first strike. “The enemy’s [military] potential is greater,” Khrushchev said. “Whoever has the greater potential is more interested in intelligence.” This disagreement did not end at Geneva. It became a source of tension between the two men, as Khrushchev’s views on the role of intelligence in disarmament only hardened, even as Soviet power grew.

At the cocktail session following the formal meeting, Khrushchev approached Eisenhower at the small buffet bar. Charles Bohlen, who was interpreting, heard him say, “Mr. President, we do not question the motive with which you put forward this proposal, but in effect whom are you trying to fool?” Before Eisenhower could respond, Khrushchev added, “In our eyes, this is a very transparent espionage device, and those advisers of yours who suggested it knew exactly what they were doing. You could hardly expect us to take this seriously.”38

The vehement rejection surprised the U.S. president. This had been his proposal, his personal effort to neutralize the combustible mixture of poor strategic intelligence and public anxiety within the highly charged environment in Washington. When Eisenhower tried to dispel Khrushchev’s suspicions by pointing to the fact that the surveillance would be mutual, the Soviet leader only promised “to study” the proposal, but he remained obdurate.39

Eisenhower’s and Dulles’s statements at Geneva concerning the German question were no more appealing to Khrushchev because they betrayed an unwillingness to recognize the legitimacy of East Germany as a separate political unit, let alone envision it as an equal partner in a European union. The West insisted that there could be no reduction in military forces in Europe, no collective security agreement, no minimal on-site inspection regime, before Germany reunified.

The conference ended on July 23 with an agreement to convene a meeting in October, again in Geneva, of the four foreign ministers to continue discussing European security. The Western and Soviet sides were no closer together on the central question of whether European disarmament or German reunification should come first. The Soviet position was that disarmament could occur before German reunification, but the Americans, French, and British disagreed. To ensure that the conference ended without rancor, the two sides agreed to have their foreign ministers discuss these two goals simultaneously in the hope of narrowing the gap later.

Despite the lack of movement on both disarmament and the German issue, that the Soviet delegation left in a good mood was a testament to the low expectations that it had in coming to this summit. Instead of seeing a defeat in the absence of any agreement, the Presidium’s representatives were delighted that they had been treated with respect by the other great powers and had effectively ended the Soviet Union’s diplomatic isolation. At the airport departure ceremony on July 24 Bulganin said that “what has already been done in Geneva is a new step in the relaxation of tension among nations [that] should contribute to the spirit of cooperation that one can already discern.”40 In Moscow Anastas Mikoyan, who was heading up the Kremlin in Khrushchev’s absence, told reporters that “the international environment has changed and the weather is good. When the weather is good, everything is good.”41

The actual weather was not very good for President Eisenhower, who arrived in a downpour at Washington’s National Airport on July 24. Fearful of any comparisons to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain’s return to London from the ill-fated Munich Conference with Adolf Hitler in 1938, Vice President Nixon had forbidden the use of umbrellas at the arrival ceremony.42 With rain “cascading off” his bald head, a sodden Eisenhower was understandably less exuberant than the Soviets about the new international climate as he spoke into the assembled microphones. He lauded the “many new contacts” formed between East and West but cautioned that “the coming months” would show what it all meant for world peace.43
Vice President Richard Nixon had rarely seen his friend Foster Dulles so tired. The secretary of state, who flew in two hours after the president, slumped into the backseat of his official car. Nixon rode back to Washington beside him and was the tonic that the older man seemed to need. Dulles easily unburdened himself.

“No one will ever realize what a tremendous burden this conference was to me,” said Dulles. As Nixon dictated that night in a taped diary entry, “[Dulles] said the President did a magnificent job but that, of course, it was necessary for him to keep the President advised of all of the curves that might be thrown so that in his extemporaneous remarks he would not make a statement which the other side might pick up and use against us.” In Dulles’s mind, the president was susceptible to saying the wrong things just because he wanted to make a good impression.

Dulles confessed that he was never sure how well his man would perform in high-level negotiations. In the car with Nixon, the secretary of state revealed that he was relieved that the United States had “not lost anything” in Geneva, with the implication that the president might have committed some harmful faux pas. The conference safely over, Dulles allowed himself the luxury of admitting that there had been at least one possible benefit of the experience: “The President had been exposed to the Communists.” In particular, the meeting for which the president had held out such hope—and for which Dulles had shown nothing but polite disdain—was a bust. Eisenhower’s visit with his wartime “buddy” Marshal Zhukov, Dulles related, “had not amounted to much except that it was good for the President to meet with Zhukov in this manner and to learn for himself that even a man he considered to be a friend would invariably take the hard Communist line whenever he attended a conference.”

Following the conference, the American press described it as a good first step. “Geneva was not a third act, but a prologue,” said the Baltimore Sun. The St. Louis Globe-Democrat remarked in the same vein: “[Geneva] did illuminate the road—and . . . if the world will be patient and forbearing, the way is not now quite so long.” The New York Times editorialized: “We cannot disarm, we cannot wholly trust any agreement with Soviet Russia, until the Iron Curtain is down and freedom is established on Soviet soil. First things must come first—and these are first things. But a third World War would be no solution. A modus vivendi to avoid that frightful tragedy is essential, and we now seem a little nearer to it.”

In Moscow Khrushchev decided to continue his peace offensive. Although none of his disarmament proposals had received any detailed notice from the West at Geneva, the first secretary believed that the Soviet position was strategically and tactically wise. In July the Kremlin announced a unilateral cut in the Soviet armed forces of 640,000. In the last five years of his life Stalin had increased the size of the Soviet forces by 50 percent, and Khrushchev intended to bring that number below four million.

A second initiative was even more dramatic. Khrushchev believed that ultimately relations were bound to improve between West Germany and the Soviet Union because of the lure of the Russian market for German capital. As a young man Khrushchev had worked as an administrator of a mine in the Ukraine. The technology used in the mine was made by the German conglomerate Thyssen, and Khrushchev later often referred to this personal experience to make a point of the mutual interests of German capitalists and Soviet Communists. As far as he was concerned, this period of close and beneficial economic cooperation between the countries in the 1920s, known as the Rapallo era after the Italian town where a major agreement between the two governments was signed in 1922, represented a model for how West Germany and the Soviet Union should interact again. The Rapallo Treaty brought German recognition of the Soviet Union and the cancellation of war debts and established preferential trade between the two countries. The fact that Konrad Adenauer’s party, the Christian Democrats, received significant support from the big German industrialists who were likely to benefit from renewed trade with Russia was an incentive for Khrushchev to make an effort to cultivate the German chancellor.

Khrushchev’s first overture to Bonn had actually preceded Geneva. In early June, almost a month after the ratification of the Paris agreements, the Kremlin had issued a formal invitation to Adenauer to visit Moscow and discuss the possible normalization of relations.

If there was one man who seemed less likely than John Foster Dulles to provide Moscow with a diplomatic opening in 1955, it was the seventy-nine-year-old Konrad Adenauer. In his public speeches, the chancellor proclaimed the Federal Republic of Germany as the most anti-Communist state in Europe, and the KGB agreed that at the very least he was the most anti-Communist leader in Europe. “Adenauer,” the intelligence service reported to the Kremlin in 1955, “is a savage enemy of the Soviet Union.” A Soviet intelligence source in West Germany had described the chancellor as convinced that “any kind of negotiation with the Soviet Union is akin to a pact with the devil.”
In June the Soviets invited him to Moscow anyway. Adenauer waited until after Geneva to say yes. After the date of the visit was set for early September, Adenauer virtually ensured that not much good would come of his visit. He announced in a speech in August that there could be no normalization of relations with Moscow unless the Kremlin agreed to the reunification of Germany and the release of the remaining German prisoners of war still detained in Russia.

The KGB and the Soviet Foreign Ministry were divided over whether there was any hope for a breakthrough. On the basis of its extensive study of Adenauer's past, the KGB was the more sanguine. "The distinguishing features of Adenauer as a politician," it reported to Khrushchev and the other Soviet negotiators, "are caution, dexterity, a demonstrated willingness to compromise, a moderate patience for leading the most difficult negotiations, slyness, a lack of fastidiousness as to means and a persistence as to ends."5 The intelligence service also had informants telling them that changes in the West German political scene would require this clever man to be more tolerant of dealing with the East, if he wished to remain popular. From the chief editor of the influential Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Khrushchev's agents learned that Adenauer was a victim of his own success. Having presided over the rebirth of the German economy after its destruction in World War II and the integration of the Federal Republic into NATO, he now faced the question of how he intended to use this new power in Europe. This might require him to be a statesman. The Soviet Foreign Ministry had had a hard time getting around the language of Adenauer's August declaration. Molotov's people assumed that he was setting the stage to blame the division of Germany and international tensions on Moscow.53

Of the men in the Kremlin, only Bulganin had met Adenauer before. Bulganin had visited Cologne in the 1920s, when he was a top administrator of the city of Moscow. At the time Adenauer had been Cologne's mayor. Bulganin remembered Adenauer as quite polite, and he had a generally positive impression of the man.

The Eisenhower administration was unhappy that Adenauer planned to make this trip to Moscow. Although there was no question he was anti-Communist, the West German leader tended to exaggerate the strength of the Soviet Union, which the United States worried might cause him to reach bad agreements with Moscow just to prevent a war. On the eve of the chancellor's trip, Bulganin wrote Adenauer to calm those fears: "Let us first of all remember that the present policies of the Soviet Union are born not out of its strength, but out of its weakness; not out of its successes, but out of its failures."54 The secretary of state pointed out that Moscow realized it could not provide both guns and butter and its citizens wanted more butter. He also told Adenauer that this was not the time to relax the pressure on Moscow. "[T]hey teach the tactics of retreat, in order to gain a respite, and if they now want this respite, which seems to be the case, we have, I think, a possibility of getting the reunification of Germany as the price they must pay. Whether, and how quickly, they will pay that price remains to be seen. But I think there is a good chance that unification, on your terms, can be achieved in a couple of years if we are stout."55

Adenauer, however, turned out to be as crafty and subtle as some of Khrushchev's advisers had suggested. In Moscow, he dumped the approach that the U.S. State Department had hoped for. After a few days of frank discussions with Bulganin, Khrushchev, and Mikoyan, the West German revoked the requirement that Moscow had to promise to move ahead on German reunification. When Bulganin offered to repatriate the nine thousand or so Germans still in Soviet captivity, this was enough for Adenauer to approve the normalization of relations. By the end of 1955 the Soviet Union and West Germany had exchanged ambassadors.

Moscow kept an eye on the reaction of its own German allies. Continued nonrecognition of East Germany was one area where Adenauer still refused to budge. Bonn would talk to Moscow but not to East Berlin. Following the Adenauer visit, Bulganin and Khrushchev each traveled to East Berlin to assure the East Germans and the world that Moscow's commitment to German communism remained firm. "If anyone . . . expects us to forget the doctrine of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, he is making a tremendous mistake," Khrushchev told the East Germans. "Those who wait for this will have to wait until a shrimp learns to whistle."56

When the Western powers outmaneuvered Molotov at the foreign ministers' conference in Geneva in October 1955, Khrushchev was able to hammer the last nail in the coffin of Stalin's German policy. In the weeks before the conference the Western powers had come up with a modified version of the Eden Plan. If Germany were allowed to reunify and after elections chose to join NATO, the Soviets would get a demilitarized zone along the former East-West divide in Germany and a collective security treaty—a "treaty of assurance on the reunification of Germany"—whereby NATO would defend the new Germany against the Soviet Union. Khrushchev knew that if he represented Moscow's interests at Geneva, he would have to accept that treaty.
Moscow if any of its members attacked the Soviet Union. Designed to appeal to the German public, this proposal tested the Soviet rhetorical commitment to German reunification and to German self-determination.

Although the foreign ministers met in the same hall in the Palais des Nations that the summit had, the mood could not have more different. There was so much tension that when a press photographer accidentally dropped a camera case, every foreign minister appeared to jump.57

Despite this tension, Molotov took the bait offered by Western negotiators. He indicated that he liked the idea of a demilitarized zone in Central Europe, where armaments would be limited and inspected and there would be a ceiling on the number of French, British, U.S., and Soviet troops. However, when the Soviet foreign minister was asked if Moscow would accept the treaty securing this zone as a guarantee that a unified Germany in NATO would not pose a threat to the Soviet Union, Molotov understood that he had fallen into a trap and started repeating long-standing Soviet phrases about the problem of future German remilitarization.

On November 4 the Presidium recalled Molotov to Moscow to discuss the collapsing Soviet position in Geneva. Over an arduous two-day Presidium meeting, the leadership hashed out new language for its German policy. Molotov and the Foreign Ministry went to work on something to take back to the conference table that would permit the Soviets to regain the high ground in the competition for German public opinion.

On November 6 Molotov submitted a new position paper to the leadership.58 Although its drafters referred to it as a new proposal, it read like the old Stalinist policy on Germany. It stated that the goal of Soviet policy in Germany was the reunification of the country on the basis of all-German elections. To create the possibilities for this, the Soviet Union would propose the withdrawal of all foreign troops from the Germanys within three months and the creation of an all-German council to discuss the details of eventual German reunification. To preserve the “democratic and peace-loving” development of a reunified Germany, Moscow would also demand the rescinding of the Paris treaties—i.e., the removal of West Germany from NATO—so that a united Germany would be neutral and free of all blocs. Molotov made clear that this proposal was purely designed to make gains in the propaganda war. He did not expect the West to accept it.

Khrushchev rejected Molotov’s entire strategy and dismissed the proposal out of hand. “We won’t do it,” he said.99 “There are too many hidden dangers.” Khrushchev was not sure that the West would reject this proposal. “With that emotion,” said Kaganovich, “the West would not try again.” Khrushchev told Molotov that he had no allies in this debate. “I doubt the correctness of the proposals offered,” said Mikoyan. “I agree with the opinion of Comrades Khrushchev and Mikoyan,” added the Soviet president (a purely formal title), Kliment Voroshilov. A telling blow came from Lazar Kaganovich, who shared many of Molotov’s views but was closer to Khrushchev on the need to protect socialist regimes. “We will not let them peck the GDR [German Democratic Republic] to pieces and we told them about that,” said Kaganovich, “while they keep talking about elections.”

Khrushchev led the group in thinking about new tactics. The West had sprung a trap by hinging the success of all disarmament discussions on whether there was an agreement to reunite Germany. If Moscow did not find a way out of its current negotiating strategy, the West would conclude the Soviets could be ignored until they were forced to accept NATO’s positions on Germany and European security. “They will raise a cry,” said Khrushchev, “that the position of strength prevails . . . This is wrong.” Perhaps it was time to have the Germans settle their differences themselves and for Moscow to stop trying to reach a settlement on Germany at the four-power level. “Every politician of sound judgment,” Khrushchev concluded, “understands that in the circumstances where West Germany belongs to NATO, this question is complicated and it is not so simple to resolve it.”

The next day the meeting resumed with a speech by Khrushchev outlining the new policy. “Now they wish to speak about elections. But we have long forgotten about elections,” he said. “We won’t do it.” Khrushchev was not sure that the West would accept this proposal. “With that emotion,” said Kaganovich, “the West would not try again.”
strength. We should set up our reasoning against it." He repeated his view that it was time to change the focus of great power diplomacy. It should now be on disarmament and just the development of contacts between the blocs, leaving the German issue to Bonn and East Berlin. The success of the Adenauer visit had reduced the immediate utility of the great power negotiations on Germany for Moscow, and with the establishment of diplomatic relations there were new opportunities for the Soviets to increase their influence in West Germany. Adenauer could not live forever, and there was reason to hope that his successors might turn out to be more interested in developing relations with the East.

In this discussion Khrushchev stressed what he believed to be Moscow's new bottom line in these discussions on the German question: "We wish to preserve the regime established in the GDR." He was also happy to have Moscow's representatives make this clear to the world. As he pronounced the old German policy dead, his Presidium ally Anastas Mikoyan praised its replacement: "Our position is constructive."

In ending Molotov's stranglehold on German policy, Khrushchev had done more than alter the shading of Moscow's language on German reunification. In accepting Khrushchev's leadership on this question, the Kremlin was endorsing the line that however beneficial détente in Europe might be, it could not come at the cost of East Germany. If need be, Moscow would have to be patient, allowing forces in West Germany or in the rest of the West to move Eisenhower, Eden, and the French closer to the view that the best route to détente and disarmament lay in the recognition that there were two Germanys. "The question of European security," said Khrushchev, "can be resolved if both Germanys exist as well."61

The next night Molotov alerted journalists at a huge diplomatic reception in the Kremlin that he was returning to Geneva with new proposals. "I came here with good baggage," said Molotov, "and I am leaving tonight with even better baggage because I have heard many good things here." Once he arrived back in Geneva the representatives of the other three powers learned that Moscow had given up on four-power negotiations of the German problem.

In a one-hour speech Molotov outlined Khrushchev's new policy, and he did it in Khrushchev's language. He attacked the West for trying to deal with the Soviet Union from a "position of strength." West Germany's adherence to NATO was "an insurmountable obstacle" to reunification in the short term, he said, adding that elections now would "provoke a general dislocation" in Germany. He also stressed that the Soviet Union was committed to the survival of East Germany, which faced "a great future since it is moving along the main road of progress which is that of all mankind and since it has strong and loyal friends."63

Dulles reacted bitterly to Molotov's speech and called for a recess. This proposal, the secretary said the next day, after conferring with Eisenhower by telephone, "has largely shattered such confidence as was born at the summit conference." The French and the British representatives responded just as negatively.65 Despite Dulles's effort to show surprise, he had predicted in the summer that the Kremlin would never allow East Germany to die. In what the celebrated American columnist Walter Lippmann called the Geneva gamble, the three Western powers had tried to force the Soviets to accept that its satellite had no future.66 Apparently Molotov's bosses were not prepared to yield. After a week of inconclusive discussion and some recrimination, the "little Geneva" broke up without any agreement on when it would meet again.

This was a defining moment for both Khrushchev's conduct of Soviet policy and the Cold War. Molotov never regained his influence and would soon be replaced as a foreign minister. A few days after "little Geneva" Moscow announced that it had signed an agreement formally ending the Soviet occupation of Germany and nominally transferred the East Germans responsibility for defending the borders of the eastern zone.67 On November 22 West Germans noticed East German troops replacing Soviet soldiers on the frontier.68 Under the Potsdam Accord of 1945, Moscow had responsibility for monitoring military travel into East Germany and divided Berlin. Although Khrushchev was also eager to hand over this responsibility to the East Germans, Moscow retained it for the time being. With Molotov's loss of authority to Khrushchev, the defense of East Germany became a cardinal point in Soviet policy. Until 1990, in fact, the Soviet Union would not contemplate any security steps that might weaken the existence of its German ally or risk the reunification of Germany within NATO.

For Washington and Moscow the issue was now whether the two governments could live with the status quo in Central Europe. Dulles's policy of forcing Moscow to accept a reunified Germany in NATO had failed. There was a limit to how much Khrushchev would concede to relax international tensions.

Khrushchev and Eisenhower had fundamentally different assessments of the situation in Germany. Eisenhower rejected the notion that the German people in the east were the willing subjects of a Communist regime and had
no desire to abandon them. What Khrushchev proudly referred to as the German Democratic Republic, Eisenhower called the Soviet Zone. The future peace and stability of Europe would depend on resolving the tension between those two concepts. Thanks to Khrushchev’s energy and ambition, the German issue, which remained a core concern for both Moscow and Washington for the rest of Eisenhower’s and Khrushchev’s time in power, soon had competition from newer core concerns in geographical regions far outside the traditional areas of U.S.-Soviet rivalry.

**ARMS TO EGYPT**

“RED BLUEPRINT FOR CONQUEST” read the golden banner headline across a portrait of an unsmiling Khrushchev on the November 28, 1955, cover of Newsweek. “Russia’s supersalesman, Nikita S. Khrushchev,” went the teaser line, “has begun a month-long invasion of Asia’s have-not nations, peddling a new line of promises.”

For most of 1955 Khrushchev had largely hidden his role in reorienting Soviet foreign policy. The struggles over Soviet policy toward Austria, Yugoslavia, and Germany had taken place behind the opaque walls of the Kremlin. Over the summer rumors had circulated that Molotov might be replaced by Khrushchev’s protégé Dmitri Shepilov, the editor in chief of Pravda, but this hadn’t happened, and the usually dour foreign minister had managed to deflect attention with some uncharacteristic public joking about the speculation. At Geneva Khrushchev had been perceived as the strongest opponent of Eisenhower’s Open Skies position, but his overall influence in setting the general Soviet line in foreign policy had not yet been picked up.

It was in the third world that Khrushchev would first come to personify a new and ambitious Soviet approach to the Cold War. “Let us verify in practice whose system is better,” he proclaimed on a state trip to India in late 1955. “We say to the leaders of the capitalist states: Let us compete without war.” Khrushchev was eager to extend this competition for influence to the developing world, where the dissolution of the great European empires had brought forward a new generation of leaders who were looking for advice, money, and legitimacy.

The event that drew the world’s attention to Khrushchev’s ambitions in the developing world came in late September 1955, when Egypt’s leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, announced that his country would be buying weapons from the Soviet bloc. Cairo’s action reordered the politics of the Middle East and in the minds of Eisenhower, Eden, and the French leadership represented the great-