

# WOODROW WILSON INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR SCHOLARS



Woodrow Wilson  
International Center  
for Scholars

Lee H. Hamilton,  
Director

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES:

Joseph A. Cari, Jr.,  
Chairman  
Steven Alan Bennett,  
Vice Chairman

## PUBLIC MEMBERS

The Secretary of State  
Colin Powell;  
The Librarian of  
Congress  
James H. Billington;  
The Archivist of the  
United States  
John W. Carlin;  
The Chairman of the  
National Endowment  
for the Humanities  
Bruce Cole;  
The Secretary of the  
Smithsonian Institution  
Lawrence M. Small;  
The Secretary of  
Education  
Roderick R. Paige;  
The Secretary of Health  
& Human Services  
Tommy G. Thompson;

## PRIVATE MEMBERS

Carol Cartwright,  
John H. Foster,  
Jean L. Hennessey,  
Daniel L. Lamaute,  
Doris O. Mausui,  
Thomas R. Reedy,  
Nancy M. Zirkin

## “Why Keep Such an Army?” Khrushchev’s Troop Reductions

Matthew Evangelista

Working Paper No. 19

Washington, D.C.

December 1997



Christian Ostermann,  
Director

## ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

William Taubman  
(Amherst College)  
Chairman

Michael Beschloss  
(Historian, Author)

James H. Billington  
(Librarian of Congress)

Warren I. Cohen  
(University of Maryland-  
Baltimore)

John Lewis Gaddis  
(Yale University)

James Hershberg  
(The George Washington  
University)

Samuel F. Wells, Jr.  
(Woodrow Wilson  
Center)

Sharon Wolchik  
(The George Washington  
University)

COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT

**THE COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT  
WORKING PAPER SERIES**

**CHRISTIAN F. OSTERMANN, Series Editor**

This paper is one of a series of Working Papers published by the Cold War International History Project of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. Established in 1991 by a grant from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, the Cold War International History Project (CWIHP) disseminates new information and perspectives on the history of the Cold War as it emerges from previously inaccessible sources on “the other side” of the post-World War II superpower rivalry. The project supports the full and prompt release of historical materials by governments on all sides of the Cold War, and seeks to accelerate the process of integrating new sources, materials and perspectives from the former “Communist bloc” with the historiography of the Cold War which has been written over the past few decades largely by Western scholars reliant on Western archival sources. It also seeks to transcend barriers of language, geography, and regional specialization to create new links among scholars interested in Cold War history. Among the activities undertaken by the project to promote this aim are a periodic *BULLETIN* to disseminate new findings, views, and activities pertaining to Cold War history; a fellowship program for young historians from the former Communist bloc to conduct archival research and study Cold War history in the United States; international scholarly meetings, conferences, and seminars; and publications.

The *CWIHP Working Paper Series* is designed to provide a speedy publications outlet for historians associated with the project who have gained access to newly-available archives and sources and would like to share their results. We especially welcome submissions by junior scholars from the former Communist bloc who have done research in their countries’ archives and are looking to introduce their findings to a Western audience. As a non-partisan institute of scholarly study, the Woodrow Wilson Center takes no position on the historical interpretations and opinions offered by the authors.

Those interested in receiving copies of the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* or any of the Working Papers should contact:

**Cold War International History Project  
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars  
One Woodrow Wilson Plaza  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave, NW  
Washington, DC 20523**

**Telephone: (202) 691-4110  
Fax: (202) 691-4001  
Email: COLDWAR1@wwic.si.edu**

**CWIHP Web Page: <http://cwihip.si.edu>**

**COLD WAR INTERNATIONAL HISTORY PROJECT WORKING PAPERS SERIES**  
**Christian F. Ostermann, Series Editor**

- #1 Chen Jian, “The Sino-Soviet Alliance and China’s Entry into the Korean War”
- #2 P.J. Simmons, “Archival Research on the Cold War Era: A Report from Budapest, Prague and Warsaw”
- #3 James Richter, “Reexamining Soviet Policy Towards Germany during the Beria Interregnum”
- #4 Vladislav M. Zubok, “Soviet Intelligence and the Cold War: The ‘Small’ Committee of Information, 1952-53”
- #5 Hope M. Harrison, “Ulbricht and the Concrete ‘Rose’: New Archival Evidence on the Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-61”
- #6 Vladislav M. Zubok, “Khrushchev and the Berlin Crisis (1958-62)”
- #7 Mark Bradley and Robert K. Brigham, “Vietnamese Archives and Scholarship on the Cold War Period: Two Reports”
- #8 Kathryn Weathersby, “Soviet Aims in Korea and the Origins of the Korean War, 1945-50: New Evidence From Russian Archives”
- #9 Scott D. Parrish and Mikhail M. Narinsky, “New Evidence on the Soviet Rejection of the Marshall Plan, 1947: Two Reports”
- #10 Norman M. Naimark, “‘To Know Everything and To Report Everything Worth Knowing’: Building the East German Police State, 1945-49”
- #11 Christian F. Ostermann, “The United States, the East German Uprising of 1953, and the Limits of Rollback”
- #12 Brian Murray, “Stalin, the Cold War, and the Division of China: A Multi-Archival Mystery”
- #13 Vladimir O. Pechatnov, “The Big Three After World War II: New Documents on Soviet Thinking about Post-War Relations with the United States and Great Britain”
- #14 Ruud van Dijk, “The 1952 Stalin Note Debate: Myth or Missed Opportunity for German Unification?”
- #15 Natalia I. Yegorova, “The ‘Iran Crisis’ of 1945-46: A View from the Russian Archives”
- #16 Csaba Bekes, “The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics”
- #17 Leszek W. Gluchowski, “The Soviet-Polish Confrontation of October 1956: The Situation in the Polish Internal Security Corps”
- #18 Qiang Zhai, “Beijing and the Vietnam Peace Talks, 1965-68: New Evidence from Chinese Sources”
- #19 Matthew Evangelista, “‘Why Keep Such an Army?’” Khrushchev’s Troop Reductions”
- #20 Patricia K. Grimsted, “The Russian Archives Seven Years After: ‘Purveyors of Sensations’ or ‘Shadows Cast to the Past’?”
- #21 Andrzej Paczkowski and Andrzej Werblan, “‘On the Decision to Introduce Martial Law in Poland in 1981’ Two Historians Report to the Commission on Constitutional Oversight of the *SEJM* of the Republic of Poland”

- #22 Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tonnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg, “77 Conversations Between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964-77”**
- #23 Vojtech Mastny, “The Soviet Non-Invasion of Poland in 1980-81 and the End of the Cold War”**
- #24 John P. C. Matthews, “Majales: The Abortive Student Revolt in Czechoslovakia in 1956”**
- #25 Stephen J. Morris, “The Soviet-Chinese-Vietnamese Triangle in the 1970’s: The View from Moscow”**
- #26 Vladimir O. Pechatnov, translated by Vladimir Zubok, “‘The Allies are Pressing on You to Break Your Will...’ Foreign Policy Correspondence between Stalin and Molotov and Other Politburo Members, September 1945-December 1946”**
- #27 James G. Hershberg, with the assistance of L.W. Gluchowski, “Who Murdered ‘Marigold’? New Evidence on the Mysterious Failure of Poland’s Secret Initiative to Start U.S.-North Vietnamese Peace Talks, 1966”**
- #28 Laszlo G. Borhi, “The Merchants of the Kremlin—The Economic Roots of Soviet Expansion in Hungary”**
- #29 Rainer Karlsch and Zbynek Zeman, “The End of the Soviet Uranium Gap: The Soviet Uranium Agreements with Czechoslovakia and East Germany (1945/1953)”**
- #30 David Wolff, “‘One Finger’s Worth of Historical Events’: New Russian and Chinese Evidence on the Sino-Soviet Alliance and Split, 1948-1959”**
- #31 Eduard Mark, “Revolution By Degrees: Stalin's National-Front Strategy For Europe, 1941-1947”**
- #32 Douglas Selvage, “The Warsaw Pact and Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1963-1965”**
- #33 Ethan Pollock, “Conversations with Stalin on Questions of Political Economy”**
- #34 Yang Kuisong, “Changes in Mao Zedong’s Attitude towards the Indochina War, 1949-1973”**
- #35 Vojtech Mastny, “NATO in the Beholder’s Eye: Soviet Perceptions and Policies, 1949-1956”**
- #36 Paul Wingrove, “Mao’s Conversations with the Soviet Ambassador, 1953-55”**
- #37 Vladimir Tismăneanu, “Gheorghiu-Dej and the Romanian Workers’ Party: From de-Sovietization to the Emergence of National Communism”**
- #38 János Rainer, “The New Course in Hungary in 1953”**
- #39 Kathryn Weathersby, “‘Should We Fear This?’ Stalin and the Danger of War with America”**
- #40 Vasiliy Mitrokhin, “The KGB in Afghanistan” (English Edition)**

#### **Special Working Papers Series**

- #1 Mark Kramer, “Soviet Deliberations during the Polish Crisis, 1980-1981”**

## **“Why Keep Such An Army?” : Khrushchev’s Troop Reductions**

**Matthew Evangelista**

Following Stalin’s death in March 1953, the Soviet Union undertook a number of initiatives ostensibly intended to reduce international tensions and improve prospects for arms control. Perhaps the most significant was the cut in Soviet conventional forces by nearly half between 1953 and 1961. Yet, the Eisenhower administration publicly denigrated the Soviet gesture, maintaining that it was forced on the USSR by economic conditions, was militarily insignificant in an age of nuclear weapons, and was not intended to serve the goal of détente.

Recently available archival materials, from Russia, the United States, and Britain, as well as memoir accounts by Soviet officials, their advisers, and their relatives, shed new light on Khrushchev’s military reforms. They permit a reevaluation of the explanations offered for the Khrushchev initiatives at the time and since. Using these new sources, this paper examines the motives for and consequences of the Soviet troop reductions of the 1950s and early 1960s, and considers whether changes in the behavior of the Eisenhower and Kennedy Administrations could have improved Khrushchev’s chances to achieve successful military reform, which, in the event, had to await the arrival of Mikhail Gorbachev a quarter century later.

### **THE KHRUSHCHEV INITIATIVES**

Evidence for Soviet restraint in the deployment of conventional military forces during the Khrushchev period consists mainly of the unilateral troop reductions and Soviet disarmament proposals that represented compromises intended to meet Western demands. The following sections review the internal and external sources of these initiatives and consider whether the moves should be seen as forced by economic conditions, desired as militarily expedient, or intended to signal interest in further restraint and negotiated disarmament accords.

## Arms Control

East-West disarmament negotiations began soon after the end of World War II and included discussion of conventional as well as nuclear forces.<sup>1</sup> The talks, held for many years under the auspices of the United Nations, made little progress while Stalin was alive. A number of observers and participants, including former Soviet officials, have argued that a major change in Moscow's approach to arms negotiations took place following his death. For example, a Soviet defector, who had specialized in disarmament at the Foreign Ministry, quoted his superior as revealing that "We're starting a new policy that will mean serious negotiating on disarmament."<sup>2</sup> He dated the change in policy to 1954.<sup>3</sup> A Yugoslav diplomat, whom Khrushchev treated as somewhat of a confidant, presented further evidence of the new leader's interest in the issue.<sup>4</sup> The new, cooperative approach to arms control coincided with concessions in other foreign policy areas, such as the status of Austria.<sup>5</sup>

The change in Soviet policy first became evident in the spring of 1955. On May 10, the USSR put forward a proposal that incorporated the main features of an earlier Anglo-French memorandum that was intended to form the basis for the future work of the UN Disarmament Subcommittee. The United States had already expressed support for the memorandum's goals, which included major reductions in all armed forces and conventional armaments, in addition to prohibition of the use and manufacture of nuclear weapons and the establishment of adequate organs of control and inspection. The USSR's

<sup>1</sup>This section draws on my article, "Cooperation Theory and Disarmament Negotiations in the 1950s," *World Politics* 42: 4 (July 1990). For a discussion of the early negotiations, see McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices about the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), chap. 4. For a more comprehensive account: Bernhard G. Bechhoefer, *Postwar Negotiations for Arms Control* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1961).

<sup>2</sup>Arkady N. Shevchenko, *Breaking with Moscow* (New York: Knopf, 1985), pp. 72-84, at p. 78.

<sup>3</sup>Shevchenko, personal communication, 23 September 1987.

<sup>4</sup>Veljko Micunovic, *Moscow Diary*, trans. by David Floyd (New York: Doubleday, 1980), pp. 157, 166.

<sup>5</sup>Vladislav Zubok, "SSSR-SShA: put' k peregovoram po razoruzheniu v iadernyi vek (1953-1955 gg.) [USSR-USA: The road to negotiations on disarmament in the nuclear age (1953-1955)], paper presented at a conference at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, October 1988; Oleg Troyanovsky, "Nikita Khrushchev and the Making of Soviet Foreign Policy," paper prepared for a conference on the centenary of Nikita Khrushchev's birth held at Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, 1-3 December 1994; Vojtech Mastny, "Kremlin Politics and the Austrian Settlement," *Problems of Communism* 31 (July-August 1982), pp. 37-51; Deborah Welch Larson, "Crisis Prevention and the Austrian State Treaty," *International Organization* 41: 1 (Winter 1987), pp. 27-60. See also Lincoln P. Bloomfield, Walter C. Clemens, Jr., and

adherence to the plan would have entailed cutting back the Soviet armed forces to 1-1.5 million soldiers from nearly 5 million soldiers. These figures, proposed originally by the Western powers, would have constituted a significantly disproportionate reduction in Soviet forces, compared to those of France, Britain, or the United States. In return, the Soviets would benefit from the eventual destruction of stocks of U.S. nuclear weapons, but their own would have to be destroyed as well. The USSR seemed willing to accept such a deal. Yet, in response to the Soviet concessions, the United States withdrew its support for the Western position and no agreement was reached.<sup>6</sup>

We know now that the May 1955 proposal was a serious one, deliberately formulated as a "new approach" that would help to fulfill Khrushchev's directive to the Foreign Ministry to seek an improvement in the international atmosphere by "decisively clearing away the 'barriers' in international affairs," as one retired official recalled in 1988.<sup>7</sup> Because the proposal came so close to the Western position, the wholesale U.S. rejection of the Soviet initiative surprised its authors: "For us who had worked out the proposal of May 10th, all this was inconceivable."<sup>8</sup>

Variations on the May 1955 proposal continued to form the basis for subsequent Soviet negotiating positions until the Soviets left the UN Disarmament Subcommittee in December 1957. In addition to these overall plans, the Soviets supported various partial measures, including the establishment of demilitarized and denuclearized zones in Central Europe. The USSR supported the so-called Eden Plan in 1954 and 1955, as well as the

---

Franklyn Griffiths, *Khrushchev and the Arms Race: Soviet Interest in Arms Control and Disarmament, 1954-1964* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966).

<sup>6</sup>The classic account of these negotiations is Philip Noel-Baker, *The Arms Race: A Programme for World Disarmament* (New York: Oceana, 1958), pp. 12-30. For accounts by a key Soviet participant, see A.A. Roshchin, "Gody obnovleniia, nadezhd i razocharovanii (1953-1959 gg.)" [Years of renewal, hopes and disappointment (1953-1959)], *Novaia i noveishaia istoriia* [New and newest history], No. 5 (September-October) 1988, pp. 127-147; and Roshchin, *Mezhdunarodnaia bezopasnost' i iadernoe oruzhie* [International security and nuclear weaponry] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia, 1980), pp. 119-132. The Soviet proposal is reprinted in *Documents on Disarmament, 1945-1959, Vol. 1, 1945-1956* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1960), 456-467; and is discussed in a declassified official "Progress Report, Proposed Policy of the United States on the Question of Disarmament," Volume I, 26 May 1955, Special Staff Study for the President, NSC Action No. 1328, by Harold E. Stassen, document located in papers of the Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, NSC Series, Policy Papers Subseries, Box 2, Folder: "NSC 112/1 Disarmament (3)," Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas (hereafter DDEL). A detailed analysis of Soviet objectives is found in Bloomfield, et al., *Khrushchev and the Arms Race*.

<sup>7</sup>Roshchin, "Gody obnovleniia," pp. 127-129.

various versions of the Rapacki plan put forward by the Polish foreign minister in 1957 and 1958.<sup>9</sup>

### The Troop Reductions

Reductions in Soviet troop strength in the 1950s and early 1960s were carried out in several stages. Declassified Soviet military documents indicate that the reductions did not correspond precisely to the official Soviet announcements at the time, which had formed the basis for all previous Western analyses. Most observers, for example, accepted Khrushchev's figure of 5.763 million troops as an accurate description of the size of the Soviet armed forces in 1955.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the documents reveal that the authorized strength of the armed forces in that year was about 4.8 million, with the actual strength somewhat less.<sup>11</sup> The high point of postwar Soviet troop strength evidently came in 1953, when the authorized forces numbered about 5.4 million. Thus, the first major reductions were not the ones that Khrushchev announced with much fanfare in August 1955, but were ones that took place unannounced following Stalin's death in March 1953. The authorized strength of the armed forces was reduced by about 600,000 troops between then and Khrushchev's August 1955 announcement.<sup>12</sup> That announcement promised a reduction of 640,000 troops to be completed by mid-December 1955. The declassified documents indicate that only 340,000 troops were actually demobilized, producing a force of 4.4 million by January 1956, some 300,000 more than would have resulted from the full, announced reduction. Those "missing" 300,000 troops were not demobilized, but rather

---

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>9</sup>Bloomfield, et al., *Khrushchev and the Arms Race*, pp. 147-151.

<sup>10</sup>Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 164-166; Raymond L. Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Force Levels: Some Light from the Past," *International Security* 14: 4 (Spring 1990), pp. 93-109.

<sup>11</sup>"Spravka-doklad [G.K. Zhukova o sokrashchenii Vooruzhennykh Sil, 12 avgusta 1955 g.], " Originally classified as "strictly secret, of special importance," reprinted in the collection entitled "Sokrashchenie Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v seredine 50-x godov" [Reduction of the USSR Armed Forces in the mid-1950s], *Voennye arkhivy rossii* [Military archives of Russia] 1 (1993), pp. 271-309, at p. 280.

<sup>12</sup>"Zapiska G. Zhukova i V. Sokolovskogo v TsK KPSS o khode vypolneniia postanovleniia Soveta Ministrov SSSR ot 12 avgusta 1956 g. o sokrashchenii chislennosti Sovetskoi Armii i s predlozheniiami po dalneishemu sokrashcheniu Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, 9 fevralia 1956 g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 271-309.



assigned to inactive, low-strength units (*nekomplekt*).<sup>13</sup> In May 1956 a further demobilization of 1,200,000 troops was announced. In November 1957, Marshal Rodion Malinovskii, the Soviet defense minister, revealed in conversation with three American journalists, that the Soviet armed forces had been reduced by 1.4 million "over the last couple of years" [*za poslednyye gody*].<sup>14</sup> In January 1958, a month after breaking up the UN disarmament subcommittee, the Soviets announced a unilateral reduction of 300,000 troops; it was completed a year later.<sup>15</sup> In January 1960, Khrushchev announced a reduction of another 1,200,000 troops, including 250,000 officers. It was scheduled to be completed by the following winter, but was suspended during the Berlin crisis.<sup>16</sup>

**Table 1: Khrushchev's Announced Troop Reductions**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Announced Amount</u>
August 1955	640,000
May 1956	1,200,000
January 1958	300,000
January 1960	1,200,000 (not completed)

Source: Thomas W. Wolfe, Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), pp. 164-166.

<sup>13</sup>"O sokrashchenii chislennosti vooruzhennykh sil" [On the reduction of the strength of the armed forces], resolution of the Council of Ministers, No. 1481-825ss, 12 August 1955, *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), p. 273.

<sup>14</sup>V.S. Golubovich, *Marshal Malinovskii* (Kiev: Politizdat Ukrainy, 1988), p. 212. For the journalists' account, see William Randolph Hearst, Jr., Bob Considine, and Frank Conniff, *Ask Me Anything: Our Adventures with Khrushchev* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1960), pp. 148-155. It does not include that remark, but other details coincide.

<sup>15</sup>The actual reduction was somewhat less: 289,668. See "Zapiska R. Malinovskogo v TsK KPSS o rabote po sokrashcheniiu Vooruzhennykh Sil, 8 ianvaria 1959 g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 305-307.

<sup>16</sup>*Krasnaia zvezda*, 20 January 1960; Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe, 1945-1970*, pp. 164-166; Garthoff, "Estimating Soviet Military Force Levels;" George F. Minde II and Michael Hennessey, "Reform of the Soviet Military under Khrushchev and the Role of America's Strategic Modernization," in Robert O. Crummey, ed., *Reform in Russia and the U.S.S.R.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 182-206.

**Table 2: Personnel Strength of Soviet Armed Forces, 1953-56**

<u>Date</u>	<u>Authorized</u>	<u>Actual</u>
March 1953	5,396,038	not available
August 1955	4,815,870	4,637,523
January 1956	4,406,216	4,147,496

*Source:* "Zapiska G. Zhukova i V. Sokolovskogo v TsK KPSS o khode vpolneniia postanovleniia Soveta Ministrov SSSR ot 12 avgusta 1956 g. o sokrashchenii chislenosti Sovetskoi Armii i s predlozheniiami po dalneishemu sokrashcheniu Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, 9 fevralia 1956 g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii*, 1 (1993), p. 283.

The following sections explore the extent to which the Soviet initiatives—disarmament proposals and unilateral measures—were the result of changes in military requirements, internal economic pressures, or U.S. behavior.

### Military Requirements

One common explanation holds that Khrushchev's reductions were not a sign of restraint or moderation in security policy at all, but merely a product of changing military requirements. In this view, mass armies of the traditional type were no longer necessary in an age of battlefield nuclear warfare: the extensive demobilization of ground and tactical air forces was a sensible means to "modernize" the Soviet armed forces with missiles and tactical nuclear weapons. From this perspective, the troop reductions were entirely in the Soviets' interest and should not be considered as concessions intended to demonstrate a new cooperative attitude towards disarmament.

Some observers have argued precisely along these lines that the change in the Soviet attitude towards Western disarmament plans, for example, was a bluff. Walt W. Rostow has suggested that the USSR's proposals were designed "to encourage complacency in the West." The Soviets' intention, in his view, was not to signal a willingness to restrict their armaments, but rather "to induce the West to diminish the

attention and outlays devoted to the arms race," while they continued "to close the gap in weapons of mass destruction and to modernize their ground forces."<sup>17</sup>

### More Rubble for the Ruble

The interpretation that the reductions did not hurt but rather benefited Soviet military capabilities apparently stems from the belief that nuclear weapons—especially tactical nuclear weapons—compensated for cuts in conventional forces. The "more bang for the buck" argument was widely promoted in the United States by the Eisenhower administration to support nuclearization of NATO forces on grounds of cost-effectiveness. Khrushchev put forward his own version—often dubbed "more rubble for the ruble"—to justify his disarmament proposals and his unilateral troop cuts.

Yet it would be inaccurate to imply that reduction of conventional forces on military grounds was a consensus position, either within the United States or USSR. In the U.S., for example, the Army chief of staff himself disagreed with the president's policy. In 1954, Gen. Matthew Ridgway claimed that the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons "does not warrant the assumption that the need for soldiers will become less. On the contrary," he argued, "there are indications that the trend will be in the opposite direction." He cited several reasons for needing more forces: the increased depth of the battlefield, the need for greater dispersion of forces, and the multiplication of maintenance and support facilities to supply large numbers of small, mobile combat units.<sup>18</sup>

On the Soviet side, many prominent military officers agreed with their American counterparts. They cited arguments by U.S. Generals Bradley, Collins, Ridgway, Taylor,

---

<sup>17</sup>W.W. Rostow, *Open Skies: Eisenhower's Proposal of July 21, 1955* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 20.

<sup>18</sup>Ridgway's remarks come from a speech delivered on 9 September 1954, quoted in Memorandum for Admiral Radford, Subject: Differing Philosophies, Generals Ridgway and Gruenther, 11 September 1954, p. 3, CJCS 092.2 North Atlantic Treaty, Modern Military Branch, National Archives (MMB NA). I am grateful to Charles Naef for calling this document to my attention. Ridgway expressed similar views in Congressional testimony, in an undated document, "Notes for Questions or Comment," Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, Alphabetical Subseries, Box 3, Folder: "Army--Testimony [by Gen. Ridgway] re Strength," DDEL. See also his biography, Matthew Ridgway, *Soldier* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1956). For similar views from other Army officers, see Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1960); and James Gavin, *War and Peace in the Space Age* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1958) pp. 139, 151, 229.

and others to support a case for maintaining mass armies.<sup>19</sup> Lt. Gen. Krasil'nikov of the General Staff, for example, argued that the prospect of a nuclear battlefield "calls not for the reduction of the numbers of combatants, but for their logical further increase, since the threat of wiping out divisions grows, and large reserves will be needed for their replacement."<sup>20</sup> Marshal Malinovskii, who, as defense minister, oversaw Khrushchev's troop reductions from 1957 to 1964, maintained a thoroughly traditional view of the role of tanks and armored vehicles. Despite the nuclear revolution, his evaluation reflected his wartime experience: "The more machines on the battlefield, he thought, the fewer the losses, the more certain the successes."<sup>21</sup>

### Marshal Zhukov's Role

Significantly, Marshal Georgii Zhukov—Malinovskii's predecessor as defense minister from 1955 to 1957—appears not to have opposed the initial cuts. None of the reminiscences about Zhukov suggests that the troop reductions were a source of conflict between him and Khrushchev.<sup>22</sup> On the contrary, Khrushchev, in his tape-recorded reminiscences, stated that Zhukov initiated many of the proposals for reductions in personnel and military spending. Whether or not that is an overstatement of the case, Zhukov does seem to have been a reliable executor of Khrushchev's policies. It was Zhukov, for example, who dismissed Admiral Nikolai Kuznetsov as commander of the navy ("in an exceptionally rude manner," as the admiral later recalled) in 1956, when the latter came into conflict with Khrushchev over the scope and nature of the Soviet naval program.<sup>23</sup> And Zhukov's support was apparently crucial in helping Khrushchev overcome the opposition of the "anti-Party group" in June 1957.<sup>24</sup> Khrushchev does not

---

<sup>19</sup>See the discussion in Raymond L. Garthoff, *Soviet Strategy in the Nuclear Age* (New York: Praeger, 1958), pp. 124-125.

<sup>20</sup>S. Krasil'nikov, *Marksizm-Leninizm o voine i armii* [Marxism-Leninism on war and the army] (Moscow: Voenizdat, 1956), pp. 148, 150-151, discussed in *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup>Golubovich, *Marshal Malinovskii*, pp. 218-219.

<sup>22</sup>See, e.g., Iu. V. Aksiutin, ed., *Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev: materialy k biografii* (Moscow: Politizdat, 1989). Also, Sergei Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo v 1953-64 godakh" (Nikita Khrushchev and military construction in 1953-64), paper prepared for the Khrushchev centenary conference, Brown University, 1-3 December 1994.

<sup>23</sup>(Capt.) O. Odnokolenko, "Narkom Kuznetsov," *Krasnaia zvezda*, 21 May 1988, p. 4. Also, Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo," pp. 9-14.

<sup>24</sup>Fedor Burlatskii, "Khrushchev: Shtriki k politicheskomu portretu," *Literaturnaia gazeta*, 24 February 1988, p. 14.

seem to have been motivated by Zhukov's attitude toward the military reforms when he decided to fire the marshal in October 1957.<sup>25</sup>

Zhukov was evidently instrumental in promoting the nuclearization of the Soviet armed forces and was apparently willing to go along with Khrushchev's desire for cuts in order to be able to do so.<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, the 1955 reductions coincided with a reorganization of the ground forces that included reductions in personnel levels of individual units in the overall structure.<sup>27</sup> In this regard, the cuts made military sense, although presumably the Soviets could have formed additional units with the excess personnel if their goal were only to streamline the force structure.

### From Reluctance to Resistance

If the troop reductions were dictated by Soviet security requirements, one might expect to find that the military high command had initiated them or at least had gone willingly along with the political leadership's directive. This may be the case for the early reductions through 1955. The subsequent cuts, however, engendered considerable unease and resistance from the armed forces, as the archival materials and memoir accounts now reveal.

In implementing the reductions, the high command sought to minimize their impact on combat capability. In early 1956, Marshal Zhukov, the defense minister, and Marshal Sokolovskii, chief of the general staff, informed the Central Committee of the progress of demobilization so far. In addition to the 340,000 troops demobilized in response to the August 1955 order, the defense ministry had reduced the army by a further 65,400 troops, including nearly 17,000 troops withdrawn when the Soviet base at Porkkala-Udd was

---

<sup>25</sup>For Zhukov's own interpretation of the reasons for his firing, see A.D. Mirkina and V.S. Iarovikov, eds., *Marshal Zhukov: polkovodets i chelovek*, vol. 2 (Moscow: Novosti, 1988), pp. 70-71. [Ed. note: Further information should emerge on Zhukov's ouster with the declassification in 1996 of the October 1957 CPSU CC Plenum, located at the Storge Center for Contemporary Documentation [*Tsentr Khraneniia sovremennoi dokumentatsii*, hereafter TsKhSD], the former CPSU CC archives in Moscow. On this, see "plenum section" of *CWIHP Bulletin* 10.]

<sup>26</sup>Vladimir Karpov, *Polkovodets* (Moscow: Sovetskii pisatel', 1985), esp. p. 524; Igor Itskov and Marina Babak, "Marshal Zhukov," part 3, *Ogonek* 51 (December 1986), p. 27; Matthew Evangelista, *Innovation and the Arms Race: How the United States and the Soviet Union Develop New Military Technologies* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), pp. 236-239.

<sup>27</sup>Minde and Hennessey, "Reform of the Soviet Military under Khrushchev," pp. 183-184. "Spravka-Doklad G.K. Zhukova o sokrashchenii Vooruzhennykh Sil, 12 avgusta 1955 g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 280-281.

returned to Finland.<sup>28</sup> Apparently under political pressure to do more, the military leaders expressed willingness to cut the army by a further 420,000 troops during 1956. Many of the cuts were to come from noncombat formations, such as the proposed reduction of 126,000 construction troops. Reductions were to be implemented by such actions as transferring officers' dining facilities and stores to civilian control and closing or transforming many of the army's educational facilities, such as its military law academy and its 15 music schools.<sup>29</sup>

The Central Committee approved the military's proposals for reducing the army by 420,000 in March 1956, but that was apparently not enough for Khrushchev. Less than two months later, the Soviet government announced that the army would be cut by 1.2 million over the next year. We have known for some time from open sources that this announcement caused considerable unhappiness within the armed forces. In 1982, for example, a former commander of an air defense division wrote in his memoirs that the late 1950s were "a difficult time for us military people. We still hadn't managed to survive the first unilateral reduction of the Soviet armed forces when a second began. Some of us didn't take the so-called reforms very cheerfully. Sometimes it seemed that everything we had done up until then was now unnecessary."<sup>30</sup> In early 1988, a senior Soviet military officer recalled the 1956 reduction in a thinly disguised warning against any further such unilateral initiatives: "As a professional military man, I'll tell you that the step was a rash one, it dealt a terrible blow to our defence capacity, and to our officer personnel. At the time skilled personnel, with tremendous combat know-how, left the army. The army officer lost prestige in the eyes of young people. To be honest, we are still feeling this."<sup>31</sup>

The new archival materials disclose that by mid-1956 Khrushchev and the political leadership were already apprised of the army's negative reaction to the cuts. In a report to the Central Committee, two senior officials stated that "some of our officers express doubts about the expediency of a unilateral reduction." The report provided several evocative quotes from disgruntled commanders warning about (West) German

---

<sup>28</sup>"Zapiska G. Zhukova i V. Sokolovskogo," p. 283.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., pp. 283-288.

<sup>30</sup>Vladimir Lavrinenkov, *Bez voiny* [Without war] (Kiev: Politizdat Ukrainy, 1982), p. 225.

remilitarization and U.S. intentions, and recalling the Nazi invasion of the USSR in 1941. The authors described a "mood of nervousness and uncertainty" among officers who were demobilized without guarantees of adequate housing or work, or even a pension. Some were driven to contemplate suicide ("If it weren't for the children, it would be a bullet in the forehead"). These detailed examples undermined the report's obligatory reference to "an overwhelming majority" of the troops who supposedly supported the reductions and looked upon them as "a great step along the path of alleviating international tension and improving the welfare of the Soviet people."<sup>32</sup>

Despite the evidence of unease among the troops, the political leadership continued reducing the army with a demobilization of 300,000 troops announced in January 1958. The KGB and the Communist Party monitored the army's reaction to the new cuts and found much cause for concern. Two formerly top secret reports from March 1958 provide not only evidence of demoralization and unhappiness among the troops slated for demobilization, but suggest that the way military authorities carried out the reductions exacerbated such problems. In particular, the defense ministry was discharging officers without the right to a pension, even though they were within a year or two of eligibility (normally after 20 years of service). During five days in February 1958, the KGB read the mail of troops stationed in the Transbaikal military district and turned up "more than a hundred letters in which officers of the Soviet Army express dissatisfaction with the organizational measures connected with the reduction" and fear about their own futures. One officer wrote of being "thrown overboard a half year before the end" of his service. Another described "demobilizing officers who have 2 to 3 children, no clothing, no money, nothing, who are being dismissed without pension, lacking only 1.5-2 years [to qualify]. Everyone is in a terrible mood."<sup>33</sup>

---

<sup>31</sup>(General of the Army) Ivan Tret'iak, "Reliable Defense First and Foremost," interview with Iurii Tepliakov, *Moscow News* 8 (28 February-6 March 1988), p. 12.

<sup>32</sup>"Zapiska I. Koneva i A. Zhel'tova v TsK KPSS ob otnoshenii v armii k Zaiavleniiu Sovetskogo pravitel'stva po voprosu o razoruzhenii, 1 iunია 1956 g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 292-293.

<sup>33</sup>"Zapiska I. Serova v TsK KPSS o nedovol'stve nekotorykh ofitserov zabaikal'skogo voennogo okruga organizatsionnymi meropriiatiami po sokrashcheniiu Vooruzhennykh Sil," 1 March 1958, report from the head of the KGB, originally classified top secret, *osobaia papka*, *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 301-302.

Less than a week after receiving the KGB report, two senior Central Committee officials involved in military affairs presented a general overview of the status of the demobilization. Their report pointed out that the government's original demobilization order stipulated the officers to be dismissed as those who had completed their terms of service and were therefore eligible for pensions, those who were ill, and those who lacked "the required military and specialist training." The report described how the Ministry of Defense "complied" with the 1958 reduction order by dismissing 72,000 officers, of whom nearly 35,000 would receive no pension, even though 8,000 of these had served for 17 or more years. The majority of the demobilized officers from military districts in the eastern part of the country and from abroad were provided no housing.<sup>34</sup> One infers from the report that the military authorities, either deliberately or through incompetence, were sabotaging the demobilization efforts and creating fear and resentment among the troops and the officer corps.

It is not surprising, then, that in reporting the completion of the demobilization, Defense Minister Malinovskii found that "as a rule" the demobilized career officers "left the army with great unwillingness." Dismissal was "extremely painful" for "officers with families, who had no civilian profession, no right to a pension or housing." Tens of thousands of officers had still received no living space. Whereas the Central Committee report seemed to accuse the Defense Ministry of poor handling of the demobilization, Malinovskii blamed local political and economic authorities for inadequate support of the demobilized soldiers.<sup>35</sup>

Even though Khrushchev publicly justified his demobilizations on military grounds, and many Western observers described them as simply a means to modernize the armed forces, the troop reductions did not receive the approval or support of the military command or the rank and file troops. In fact, the more Khrushchev sought military

---

<sup>34</sup>"Zapiska I. Shikina i V. Zolotukhina v TsK KPSS, 6 marta 1987 [sic: 1958] g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 303-304.

<sup>35</sup>"Zapiska R. Malinovskogo v TsK KPSS o rabote po sokrashcheniiu vooruzhennykh Sil, 8 ianvaria 1959 g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 305-306. The report also presents a detailed account of numbers of officers discharged and for what reason.



justification for the cuts, the more the army's attitude shifted from reluctance to outright resistance.<sup>36</sup>

### Radical Doctrinal Changes

Khrushchev's most dramatic announcement of force reductions came in a major speech to the Supreme Soviet on 14 January 1960 when he explicitly associated the cuts with a new military doctrine that emphasized nuclear deterrence by a strategic missile force.<sup>37</sup> Three days later, the Central Committee addressed a "closed" letter (*zakrytoe pis'mo*) to the armed forces justifying the reductions on economic, political, and military grounds—and making exaggerated claims about the "serial production" of missiles.<sup>38</sup> The development of nuclear and missile technology meant, in Khrushchev's estimation, that a state's military capabilities depended more on nuclear "firepower" than on "how many soldiers we have under arms, how many people are wearing soldiers' greatcoats."<sup>39</sup> Thus, in his view, changing military conditions permitted a further reduction of Soviet troop strength by 1.2 million. Some time later he posed the question during a meeting with his military commanders, neither expecting nor receiving an answer: "If missiles are capable of defending us, then why do we need to keep such an army?"<sup>40</sup>

Some observers have identified a further link between military requirements and the troop reductions. They have drawn the conclusion that, in keeping with Khrushchev's new military doctrine, the savings from reducing conventional forces were used to finance the buildup of strategic weapons. This explanation is valid in a limited sense. Archival documents indicate, for example, that the pseudonymous Ministry of Medium-Machine Building—the organization responsible for development of nuclear weapons—hired 3,600 soldiers, including 600 officers, demobilized in 1960. In fact, however, the context

---

<sup>36</sup>For firsthand accounts of military criticisms, see Troyanovsky, "Nikita Khrushchev and the Making of Soviet Foreign Policy," and Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo."

<sup>37</sup>*Pravda*, 15 January 1960. [Ed. note: For new documents on Khrushchev's January 1960 troop reduction, see Vladislav M. Zubok, "Khrushchev's 1960 Troop Cut: New Russian Evidence," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 8/9 (Winter 1996/1997), pp. 416-420.]

<sup>38</sup>The letter, dated 18 January 1960, is addressed "To the Soldiers of the Valiant Armed Forces of the USSR," and is found with the original decision to draft it in 20th Convocation of the Central Committee Secretariat, from protocol no. 132, Secretariat session of 16 January 1960, located in card file (*kartoteka*) N 3, at TsKhSD. The claims about missile production are on p. 5. On the actual state of missile production during this time, see Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo."

<sup>39</sup>*Pravda*, 15 January 1960.

<sup>40</sup>Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo," p. 48.

suggests that the initiative did not come from the ministry, but from the political leaders as they sought to alleviate employment problems associated with the demobilization. The ministry's offer, in April 1960, responded to an official decree of four months earlier concerning the work and living conditions of the demobilized troops. This decree, in turn, followed Khrushchev's announcement of the troop cut. Finally, several other nonmilitary ministries—including those in charge of civil aviation and the merchant marine—made similar offers to hire demobilized troops, in what was clearly a coordinated campaign to find employment for the soldiers and officers released from service.<sup>41</sup>

During the period of major troop reductions there does seem to have been an increase in Soviet efforts in advanced-technology military fields, such as nuclear weapons and rocketry. For example, some scholars have identified a major growth (23 percent) in employment of personnel in research and development institutions from mid-1955 to the end of 1956.<sup>42</sup> But, strictly speaking, the conventional-force reductions did not compensate for the major cost of Soviet strategic weapons programs—the actual mass production of missiles—simply because that buildup occurred long after the troop cuts, indeed after Khrushchev was removed from office.<sup>43</sup> The Brezhnev era witnessed both a strategic nuclear buildup and an expensive modernization and increase in conventional forces.

With the exception of those in the newly created Strategic Rocket Forces, much of the military high command disagreed with Khrushchev's formulation of a new military doctrine that denigrated the traditional role of ground, air, and naval forces. So even

---

<sup>41</sup>This account is based on several Defense Ministry documents, all classified "secret," copies of which I have deposited at the National Security Archive, Gelman Library (7<sup>th</sup> floor), The George Washington University, Washington, DC 20052, tel. 202-994-7000, FAX 202-994-7005. A report to the Central Committee and Council of Ministers from R. Malinovskii and P. Ivanov, 24 May 1960, describes the program to place demobilized officers and soldiers with civilian ministries and gives details on its results. The remaining documents are letters from the individuals listed to the Council of Ministers: from E. Slavskii, minister of medium machine-building, 27 April 1960; from V. Bakaev, minister of the maritime fleet, 27 April 1960; from B. Butoma, chair, state committee for shipbuilding, 27 April 1960; from P. Dement'ev, chair, state committee for aviation technology, 10 May 1960; from G. Schetchikov, head, main administration of the civil air fleet (Aeroflot), 5 May 1960.

<sup>42</sup>Bloomfield, et al., *Khrushchev and the Arms Race*, p. 42.

<sup>43</sup>Jutta and Stephan Tiedtke, "The Soviet Union's Internal Problems and the Development of the Warsaw Treaty Organization," in Egbert Jahn, ed., *Soviet Foreign Policy: Its Social and Economic Conditions* (London: Allison & Busby, 1978), pp. 126-127. Also, Minde and Hennessey, "Reform of the Soviet Military," p. 185.

though both Khrushchev's public pronouncements and the Party's closed letter to the troops justified the cuts on military grounds, the army did not accept that rationale.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, whereas the closed letter emphasized the economic benefits of demobilization, military leaders were concerned about problems of morale and dislocation, as hundreds of thousands of soldiers and officers were forced to reintegrate themselves into the civilian work force. Defense Minister Malinovskii made this point himself only a few days after Khrushchev announced his 1960 round of cuts.<sup>45</sup> Military criticism of Khrushchev's reductions became particularly vocal from that point on.<sup>46</sup>

Even though Khrushchev felt obliged to suspend the 1960 troop reductions during a particularly tense period of confrontation with the United States over the status of Berlin in 1961, his commitment to military reform did not diminish. During the last years of his tenure, he made increasingly radical proposals for reducing the military forces and his views about the best means of insuring national security increasingly diverged from those of the military leadership. In private discussions with his top commanders in 1963 and 1964, Khrushchev argued that the Soviet Army should consist primarily of strategic rocket troops commanding a nuclear deterrent force of some 200-300 missiles and ground forces of no more than 300-500 thousand troops. In the recollections of his son Sergei—who was present at several of these meetings—the commanders viewed reductions to that level

---

<sup>44</sup>The best recent discussion of military opposition to Khrushchev's doctrinal changes is Thomas M. Nichols, *The Sacred Cause: Civil-Military Conflict over Soviet National Security, 1917-1992* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), esp. pp. 71-84. Nichols points out that even the Strategic Rocket Forces, after March 1963, were headed by a combined-arms officer—Marshal Ivan Krylov—who opposed the excessive emphasis on nuclear weapons at the expense of traditional forces. He argues, on pp. 78-79, that Marshal Malinovskii insisted on Krylov's appointment particularly for that reason. For a Russian account, see Il'ia Dragan, *Nikolai Krylov* (Moscow: Molodaia gvardiia, 1988), pp. 298-303. Retrospective accounts of Malinovskii's views on the importance of conventional forces would appear to support Nichols' interpretation. See, e.g., Golubovich, *Marshal Malinovskii*, esp. pp. 210-220.

<sup>45</sup>See Malinovskii's report in *Krasnaia zvezda*, 20 January 1960; for an extensive discussion see Jutta Tiedtke, *Abrüstung in der Sowjetunion: Wirtschaftliche Bedingungen und soziale Folgen der Truppenreduzierung von 1960* [Disarmament in the Soviet Union: Economic conditions and social consequences of the troop reduction of 1960] (Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag, 1985), pp. 157-179.

<sup>46</sup>Matthew Gallagher, "Military Manpower: A Case Study," *Problems of Communism* 13 (May-June 1964), pp. 53-62; Thomas W. Wolfe, *Soviet Strategy at the Crossroads* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), pp. 238-242; Tiedtke, *Abrüstung in der Sowjetunion*, pp. 54-62; Herbert Ritvo, "Internal Divisions on Disarmament in the USSR," in Seymour Melman, ed., *Disarmament: Its Politics and Economics* (Boston, MA: American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1962), pp. 212-237; Roman Kolkowicz, *The Soviet Military and the Communist Party* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967), pp. 150-173.

as heralding the "ultimate ruin of the army. The military did not want to, and could not, reconcile themselves with this."<sup>47</sup> Yet Khrushchev went even further. Drawing on his experience in Ukraine during the 1920s, following the Bolshevik victory in the Civil War, he advocated creating locally based militia forces to replace the enormous standing army of conscripts.<sup>48</sup> As Khrushchev insistently denigrated traditional weapons such as tanks and artillery, the military equally insistently extolled them.

Khrushchev's interest in demilitarized zones in central Europe, while also plausibly explicable on military grounds, did not receive support from the army. According to Aleksei Adzhubei, Khrushchev's son-in-law and political ally (as editor of the newspaper *Izvestiia*), Khrushchev desired international political reasons to withdraw Soviet forces from central Europe. In 1959, Khrushchev reportedly asked Janos Kádár, the Hungarian leader installed in office as a result of the 1956 Soviet invasion, if it were not time to remove Soviet troops from that country. Kádár demurred. At about the same time, Khrushchev evidently discussed with Polish leader Wladyslaw Gomulka the possibility of withdrawing Soviet troops from Poland.<sup>49</sup>

Khrushchev's son Sergei also mentions his father's desire to withdraw troops from those countries—for a combination of military, political, and economic reasons. The Soviet leader was convinced that security now depended on nuclear deterrence and that traditional armies were largely irrelevant. His son quotes him to that effect: "From a strategic viewpoint the presence of Soviet ground forces on the western borders is useless, and their withdrawal will give us enormous political and economic advantages." According to Sergei Khrushchev, the military leaders disagreed. The high command "did not want to withdraw from the borders won in the Second World War. Their defense, in the generals' opinion, served as the guarantor of the Soviet Union's security."<sup>50</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup>Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo," pp. 50-52.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid. For detailed consideration of the public discussion of such issues, see Walter C. Clemens, Jr., "Soviet Disarmament Proposals and the Cadre-Territorial Army," *Orbis* 7:4 (Winter 1964), pp. 778-799; Clemens, "The Soviet Militia in the Missile Age," *Orbis* 8:1 (Spring 1964), pp. 84-105.

<sup>49</sup>Aleksei Adzhubei, *Te desiat' let* [Those ten years] (Moscow: Sovetskaia Rossiia, 1989), pp. 155-156; *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, J.L. Schecter and V.V. Luchkov, trans. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990), pp. 119-120.

<sup>50</sup>Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo," p. 39.

A highly classified report from the head of Soviet military intelligence, written during the last few months of Khrushchev's tenure, reinforces the point that the military high command was loathe to give up forward deployment of large conventional forces in favor of "one-variant" nuclear war. The report, "on the development of military art in conditions of the conduct of rocket-nuclear war," was prepared by Col.-Gen. P. Ivashutin at the request of Marshal M. V. Zakharov and delivered in August 1964. When he received the document, Zakharov was in between tours as chief of the general staff; he was serving as head of the military academy of the general staff and became chief again in November 1964, after Khrushchev's removal from office. The report acknowledges the central role for nuclear weapons in any future war between the NATO countries and the Soviet bloc. But it emphasizes the importance of maintaining large ground, air, and naval forces to carry out military missions even under conditions of the use of nuclear weapons.<sup>51</sup> Clearly the Soviet military leadership was not prepared to go along with Khrushchev's radical proposals for military reform when they entailed major reductions in conventional forces.

### Economic Conditions

That Khrushchev's military reforms were motivated by economic concerns is evident from many sources. In the transcript of his tape-recorded memoirs, for example, Khrushchev's remarks about the troop reductions come directly after he expresses his belief that the United States was using the arms race to destroy the Soviet economy, "and by that means to obtain its goals even without war."<sup>52</sup> Examining gross indicators of economic performance, however, would not lead one to identify economic motives as preeminent in Khrushchev's decision to cut the armed forces. Western estimates of Soviet gross national product, for example, show that the highest GNP growth of the postwar period occurred in the 1950s, averaging 5.7 percent per year. Soviet figures are higher. The serious decline in growth rates began only in the Brezhnev period (see Table 4).

---

<sup>51</sup>"Material o razvitii voennogo iskusstva v usloviakh vedeniia raketno-iadernoi voiny po sovremennym predstavleniiam" [Material on the development of military art in conditions of the conduct of rocket-nuclear war according to current notions], prepared for Marshal M. V. Zakharov, with cover memorandum from Col. Gen. P. Ivashutin, 28 August 1964. This document, from the Russian Ministry of Defense archives, is now on deposit at the National Security Archive.

Internal Soviet reports during the Khrushchev era were often quite optimistic about the economy. Consider, for example, a report prepared by the foreign ministry, "On the Question of Economic Competition between the USSR and USA"—one of Khrushchev's favorite themes. Completed in mid-1961, during the course of the fifth round of major troop reductions, the report stressed that "for the past seven years the increase in industrial productivity in the USSR averaged 11.1 percent per year versus 2.5 percent for the United States, 4 to 5 times faster." A foreign ministry official who read the report underlined the last phrase.<sup>53</sup>

Despite the overall picture of strong economic growth, one can—by looking in more detail at annual growth rates, indicators of growth in labor productivity (see Table 3), performance in the agricultural sector, and the nature of the labor pool—find economic and demographic incentives for the reductions, but they vary from year to year.

**Table 3: Growth of National Income and Labor Productivity  
(Soviet Estimates), 1955-62**

<u>Year</u>	<u>National Income Growth (%)</u>	<u>Labor Productivity (%)</u>
1955	11.9	9.5
1956	11.3	7.0
1957	7.0	6.6
1958	12.4	6.2
1959	7.5	7.4
1960	7.7	5.4

<sup>52</sup> Transcript of Nikita Khrushchev's tape-recorded reminiscences, Harriman Institute Library, Columbia University, New York, p. 403.

<sup>53</sup> Archive of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation [Arkhiv Vneshnei Politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii], hereafter AVP, Fond: Referentura po SShA, op. 47-6, por. 3, papka 158, Otdel SShA, 24 June 1961, No. 1317, "K voprosu ob ekonomicheskom sorevnovanii mezhdû SSSR i SShA (spravka)," by Iu. Vasil'ev.

1961	6.8	4.4
1962	5.7	5.5

Source: Tsentral'noe statisticheskoe upravlenie SSSR, *Narodnoe khoziastvo SSSR v 1967 g.*: *Statisticheskii ezhegodnik* (Moscow: Statistika, 1968), p. 59, cited in Ed A. Hewett, *Reforming the Soviet Economy: Equality versus Efficiency* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1988), p. 226.

The initial reductions of the mid-1950s came at a time of impressive economic growth. As one study points out, "in the years 1954-1956 Soviet industry appears to have grown at the most rapid pace seen in the 1952-1962 decade." Growth of civilian machinery output increased from 7.5 percent in 1951-1953 to 16 percent in 1954-1956. Labor productivity increased in 1954 and 1955 at about twice the rate of the previous three years.<sup>54</sup> It could be that the desire for such high levels of growth called the leaders' attention to the value of the troop reductions. Certainly, the influx of labor from the army contributed to growth.

**Table 4: Soviet Economic Growth, 1951-1987**

	<u>GNP (%)*</u>	<u>National Income Produced (%)**</u>
1951-58	6.0	11.4
1958-61	5.8	9.1
1961-65	4.8	6.5
1966-70	5.0	7.8
1971-75	3.1	5.7
1976-80	2.2	4.3
1981-85	1.8	3.6
1986-87	2.2	3.2

\*The CIA estimated Gross National Product, in keeping with Soviet practice, to exclude services that do

not contribute directly to material output.

**\*\*Official Soviet figures for national income produced exclude depreciation and services that do not contribute directly to material product, and include some double counting of transactions between wholesale producers.**

*Sources:* For 1951-61, Philip Hanson, "Economic Constraints on Soviet Policies in the 1980s," *International Affairs* (Winter 1980-81), p. 22; for 1961-87, "Revisiting Soviet Economic Performance under *Glasnost*: Implications for CIA Estimates," CIA report SOV 88-10068, September 1988, p. 9.

Both preceding and following the August 1955 announcement of a Soviet troop cut, various references appeared in the Soviet press to the need for demobilized soldiers in the civilian economy. At a meeting of the Central Committee plenum on 4 July 1955, Marshal Nikolai Bulganin, the Soviet prime minister, referred to the labor shortage in the Soviet economy.<sup>55</sup> Following the demobilization announcement, Soviet sources identified agriculture as one of the sectors with the most pressing need for labor. Members of the British embassy in Moscow also drew that conclusion from their contacts:

An officer of the Soviet armed forces in civilian clothes told a member of this Embassy the other day that he had spent three days studying at the agricultural exhibition. When asked why, he said that the Army was being cut down and they had to prepare themselves. He had evidently been sent to Moscow on leave from Brest[-Litovsk] for this purpose.<sup>56</sup>

Later, Soviet press accounts mentioned that demobilized forces would be especially needed in the coal-mining and timber industries as well as agriculture.<sup>57</sup>

Yet demographic considerations did not necessitate the troop reductions of 1953-1955. The growth rate of the work force was declining and the number of new entrants to the work force each year was decreasing in absolute terms (see Tables 5 and 6). But the crunch was still a couple of years away (1957-1958) and there were numerous other

---

<sup>54</sup>Bloomfield, et al., *Khrushchev and the Arms Race*, chap. 3, esp. pp. 51-53.

<sup>55</sup>Bulganin's remarks are quoted and analyzed in several reports from the British embassy in Moscow from August 1955, in Foreign Office records, FO 371/113453-118673, 1955 General Correspondence: Political, File 116729, Folder NS1202/19, Public Record Office, London [hereafter PRO].

<sup>56</sup>Report from Moscow Embassy, 13 August 1955, Foreign Office records, FO 371/113453-118673, 1955 General Correspondence: Political, File 116729, Folder NS1202/11, PRO.



means to increase the work force besides demobilizing soldiers. In 1955, for example, most of the political prisoners from Stalin's labor camps were released to rejoin the work force.<sup>58</sup> If the Soviet leaders had wanted to maintain the army's size unchanged, they could have increased the work force further by providing incentives to bring more women and students into it—as they did later—and they could have refrained from initiatives such as those undertaken in 1956 to shorten the work week (although this was justified on the grounds of increasing labor productivity).<sup>59</sup> Finally, they could have made more use of soldiers in the civilian economy without demobilizing them, through the practice of *shefstvo* (lending soldiers to local industrial and agricultural enterprises), as they resumed doing in 1957.<sup>60</sup>

The decision to demobilize an additional 1.2 million troops starting in mid-1956 was evidently linked to the targets of the new (6th) Five-Year Plan (1956-1960). According to one British government analysis, the demobilized soldiers were expected to make up for shortfalls in the non-state (mainly, collective farm) sectors of the economy, either by returning to collective farms or by contributing to an increase in labor at state-owned enterprises. The reasoning was as follows: The 5th Five-Year Plan (1951-1955) saw the state-employed labor force grow by 6.7 million out of a total working-age (15-59) population growth of 11.2 million; for the 6th Five-Year Plan (1956-1960), state-employed labor would grow by 7.1 million out of a total 8.2 million. Thus, the 5th FYP saw an increment of 4.5 million for the non-state sector, whereas the 6th FYP provided for only 1.1 million. Given this anticipated shortfall in the non-state sector of the economy, "the only possible source of supply was the [armed] forces. The expected release of 1,200,000 men from the forces in 1956 would alone explain how the Soviet planners thought it would be possible to continue the rapid expansion of the State labour

---

<sup>57</sup>[Lt. Gen.] Kuleshov, "Toward Peaceful Labor," *Pravda*, 12 November 1955, quoted along with several other contemporaneous press accounts in Foreign Office records, FO 371/113453-118673, 1955 General Correspondence: Political, File 116729, Folder NS1202/23, PRO.

<sup>58</sup>Alec Nove, *An Economic History of the U.S.S.R.*, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin Books, 1989), p. 319.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>60</sup>R. Kolkowicz, *The Use of Soviet Military Labor in the Civilian Economy: A Study of Military "Shefstvo."* Rand Corporation Memorandum RM-3360-PR, Santa Monica, CA, November 1962.

force at a time when the age structure of the population was becoming so unfavorable."<sup>61</sup> This analysis suggests that the Soviet government was already planning a second demobilization, in part for economic reasons, as it was preparing the 6th FYP and carrying out the first demobilization in 1955.

If the political leaders intended the demobilizations to serve as a "quick fix" for Soviet economic deficiencies, they were surely disappointed. Archival materials reveal that the demobilized soldiers and officers frequently did not receive a warm welcome or much support from the communities supposedly in need of their labor. The military leadership had already called attention to this problem in 1956.<sup>62</sup> In May 1957, the CPSU Party leaders instructed the Central Committee and the Defense Ministry to address the issue of demobilization by means of a letter to local party organizations, military units, and ministries. In August 1957, the Central Committee distributed 9,000 copies of the "closed letter."<sup>63</sup>

The letter makes perfunctory reference to the "great joy" and "fatherly concern" with which the Soviet people welcome the demobilized soldiers. It points out, however, that some of the soldiers "have experienced difficulties" in adjusting to civilian life and "don't everywhere meet with the necessary concern and attention from local party and soviet organizations and the leaders of enterprises and institutions." In some of the larger towns and industrial centers, demobilized military personnel often found themselves without jobs or places to live and in poor material circumstances. The Central Committee called on local political and economic authorities to provide work for the ex-soldiers "no later than a month" after their arrival and "not at a lower level than the work they did before being called to military service."<sup>64</sup>

The letter points out that dealing with the demobilized soldiers in the large cities in the European parts of the USSR is particularly difficult because "there are already people

---

<sup>61</sup>Report to Brig. C.H. Tarver of the War Office, 1 August 1957, in the records of the Foreign Office, FO 371/124918-131174, 1957 General Correspondence: Political, File 129055, Folder NS 1192/8, PRO.

<sup>62</sup>"Zapiska I. Koneva i A. Zheltova."

<sup>63</sup>The letter and supporting material are found in fond 4, opis' 16, ed. khr. 318, Materialy k protokolu No. 45 zasedaniia Sekretariata TsK KPSS ot 2 Avgusta 1957 g., 20th convocation of the Central Committee Secretariat, KPSS, TsK, No. p93/1u, TsKhSD. The initial decision was taken by the Presidium at its 93rd session, 4 May 1957.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

looking for work as a result of the reduction of the state apparatus and also young men and women finishing school.” It advocates sending the ex-soldiers to areas of labor shortage: “In the interests of the state it is necessary by every means to support the patriotic striving of demobilized soldiers to go to the new construction areas of the eastern and northern regions of the country, to mines and virgin lands.” It encourages soldiers who originally came from rural areas to return there rather than move to the cities.<sup>65</sup>

**Table 5: Average Annual Growth of Work Force, 1946-1958**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Percent Growth</u>
1946-1950	11.45
1951-1953	8.67
1954-1958	4.70

*Source: Jutta Tiedtke, *Abrüstung in der Sowjetunion*, p. 77.*

**Table 6: Increase in New Entrants to Work Force**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Increase (in millions)</u>
1953	2.6
1954	2.5
1955	2.4
1956	2.1
1957	1.8
1958	0.8
1959	0.3
1960	0.3

*Source: Jutta Tiedtke, *Abrüstung in der Sowjetunion*, 79.*

---

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*

Possible economic motives for the January 1958 reduction of 300,000 troops are not difficult to identify. As Table 6 indicates, the year 1958 saw a decline of one million in the pool of new entrants to the work force, the most dramatic shortfall of the decade.

The economic motivations for the 1960 demobilization are thoroughly explored in a study by Jutta Tiedtke.<sup>66</sup> She links the troop reductions to shortfalls in the Seven-Year Plan (1959-65), especially in the newly developing industrial and agricultural regions in the Far East and Kazakhstan. According to Tiedtke, Soviet planners were well aware of the forthcoming slowdown in the growth of the labor pool—a consequence of the low birth rate during the war (see Tables 5 and 6). They originally expected to compensate for it by increasing labor productivity mainly through advanced technology and mechanization in agriculture, the much-touted switch from “extensive” to “intensive” development. Labor productivity failed to increase as expected, however, and key plan indicators went unmet. At the same time, the drive to expand agricultural and industrial production east of the Urals was not attracting the necessary numbers of workers, owing mainly to insufficient material incentives and poor quality of life. As Tiedtke explains it, the troop demobilization promised to solve both problems at once: An influx of new workers would help fulfill the plan, albeit by traditional extensive methods. A major recruitment and propaganda campaign would draw the new workers to the developing areas where they were most needed. Moreover, the discipline and *esprit de corps* associated with the newly released soldiers, in addition to their proven ability to tolerate relatively harsh living conditions, would make them ideal migrants to the new regions.

---

<sup>66</sup>Tiedtke, *Abrüstung in der Sowjetunion*.

**Table 7: Soviet Growth Rates, 1950-58 versus 1959 (in %)**

	1950-58	1959
Gross material product	+ 7.0	+ 3.9
Industrial production	+10.1	+ 8.1
Agricultural production	+ 5.7	- 4.1
Investment	+13.4	+13.2
Per capita consumption	+ 7.2	+ 2.7

*Source:* Jutta Tiedtke, *Abrüstung in der Sowjetunion*, p. 85 (per capita consumption figures in the first column are for 1952-58).

Tiedtke argues that it was specifically the demand for workers in the East that stimulated the demobilization. She accounts for the timing of the decision by pointing to the poor performance of the Soviet economy in 1959—the first year of the Seven-Year Plan. By comparison with the average of the previous eight years, 1959 saw a drop in the growth rate of the economy (gross material product) from 7.0 to 3.9 percent; the growth of labor productivity from 7.2 to 2.7 percent; and growth of agricultural production from 5.7 to *negative* 4.1 percent (see Table 7). Growth of industrial production declined by two percentage points as well, while investment growth remained the same. The Soviet leadership evidently viewed development of the new areas as the quickest means of reversing these threatening economic trends.

The archival evidence that has become available since the publication of Tiedtke's book supports much of her argument. She is right to call attention to the importance of the need for workers beyond the Urals, in Kazakhstan, the Far East, and Siberia, and on the state and collective farms. Documents reveal that the Party and the Soviet government issued numerous directives between December 1959 and March 1960 intended to promote migration of demobilized soldiers to those areas of labor shortage.<sup>67</sup>

<sup>67</sup>The directives are mentioned in a defense ministry report by R. Malinovskii and F. Golikov to the main military commands and districts, 2 April 1960. A copy of the document has been deposited in the National Security Archive.

In the Central Committee's "closed letter" to the armed forces that followed Khrushchev's announcement of the troop reductions in January 1960, much space is devoted to the economic motives and consequences of the cuts. Many paragraphs describe Soviet economic successes, including overfulfillment of the 7-year plan by 50 billion rubles' worth of production, achievements in agriculture, science, and engineering, and so forth.<sup>68</sup> But the letter also notes that "the reduction of the armed forces has great significance for our country also from the economic point of view," and mentions "savings of 16-17 billion rubles a year which will be directed to resolving national economic problems." It issues a call to the demobilized troops to "go to work in the decisive branches of the economy—to metallurgy and machine-building, to coal and chemical production, to the new construction sites of Siberia and the North, Kazakhstan and the Far East, to fields of the collective and state farms."<sup>69</sup>

Economic concerns certainly influenced Khrushchev's decisions to reduce Soviet troop strength. They also played an important role in the decision to withdraw forces from Eastern Europe as part of the demobilization campaigns, and contributed as well to his interest in proposals such as the Eden and Rapacki plans.<sup>70</sup> Both in his memoir accounts and in his son's recollection, Khrushchev frequently stressed the high cost of maintaining troops abroad compared to keeping them at home. As Sergei Khrushchev characteristically recalls, "Nikita Khrushchev did not want to, and could not, reconcile himself with the enormous expenses we bore in supporting troops on foreign territory."<sup>71</sup>

In acknowledging the important economic motives behind the troop reductions, one should not, however, neglect the other goals of Khrushchev's initiatives—in particular his desire to influence Western policy and improve the international atmosphere.

### U.S. Behavior

It is now apparent that Khrushchev did not view the reductions merely as a means to modernize the Soviet armed forces. Such a limited objective would hardly seem worth the risk of alienating important segments of the military. In addition to his economic

---

<sup>68</sup>"To the Soldiers of the Valiant Armed Forces of the USSR," 18 January 1960, pp. 3-4.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., pp. 5-6.

<sup>70</sup>For details on the troops withdrawn from various Warsaw Pact countries as part of the demobilizations, see the materials published in *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), pp. 271-309.

motives, Khrushchev does appear to have hoped that the United States would view the reductions as a concession that would improve the prospects for wide-ranging disarmament agreements. In his memoirs, Khrushchev justified the cuts by associating them with his broader disarmament proposals: "to fight for disarmament or arms reductions at the time the Soviet Union had such an enormous army—no one would believe it."<sup>72</sup>

Soviet disarmament diplomacy stressed the importance of the unilateral reductions. In January 1958, following the previous month's announcement of a cut of 300,000 troops, Soviet Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin sent a 16-page letter to U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower. He urged Eisenhower to recognize the USSR's "good intentions" as witnessed by the "reduction in recent years by almost 2 million of the strength of the armed forces of the Soviet Union, including more than 50,000 Soviet troops in the German Democratic Republic." He promised that the current round of cuts would include withdrawal of more than 41,000 troops from East Germany and 17,000 from Hungary.<sup>73</sup> Archival documents indicate that these forces were, in fact, withdrawn.<sup>74</sup> Bulganin argued that "if the Western powers would make similar steps, then that would be a big contribution to the beginning of the liquidation of the 'cold war,'" to the reduction of the armed forces of all countries, and to disarmament.<sup>75</sup> In a similar fashion, senior Soviet diplomats, as well as military officials, sought to convey to the West that the troop reductions demonstrated the USSR's peaceful intentions.<sup>76</sup>

Given the importance of the West, and the United States, in particular, to Soviet considerations, a number of questions arise: To what extent did the Soviet reductions represent a reaction to U.S. policy? In particular, did the United States induce Soviet

---

<sup>71</sup>Khrushchev, "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo," p. 39.

<sup>72</sup>Khrushchev transcript, pp. 403-404. [Ed. note: On this issue, see also Zubok, "Khrushchev's 1960 Troop Cut" cited above.]

<sup>73</sup>Letter from Bulganin to Eisenhower, 8 January 1958, in AVP, Fond: Ref. po SShA, op. 44, por. 20, papka 89, Otdel stran Ameriki, 102-SShA, "Exchange of correspondence between Bulganin, N.S. Khrushchev and D. Eisenhower, 8 January - 2 June 1958."

<sup>74</sup>"Zapiska R. Malinovskogo i V. Sokolovskogo v TsK KPSS s predlozheniiami po dal'neishemu sokrashcheniiu Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR, 3 ianvaria 1956 [sic: 1958] g.," *Voennye arkhivy rossii* 1 (1993), p. 297.

<sup>75</sup>Letter from Bulganin to Eisenhower, 8 January 1958, AVP.

<sup>76</sup>See, e.g., Malinovskii's comments to journalists, quoted at length in Golubovich, *Marshal Malinovskii*, esp. pp. 218-219.

restraint by pursuing a policy of “negotiation from strength” or did the U.S. encourage Soviet moderation by reducing its own military threat to the USSR? Did Western reactions to the Soviet initiatives play any role in determining whether Khrushchev would be able to continue his policy of restraining military growth? The picture is somewhat mixed.

### Negotiation from Strength

A consideration of the overall context of Soviet military policy at the time provides some background for understanding the interaction of U.S. and Soviet behavior. Stalin’s death in March 1953 left his successors to deal with a number of pressing issues in the military sphere. During the next several years the Soviet leadership faced crucial decisions, for example, concerning the character and scope of the strategic nuclear weapons program. Khrushchev and his allies appear to have wanted to use a disarmament agreement as a substitute for expensive new weapons that would undercut his domestic economic plans.

In the mid 1950s Khrushchev seems to have been motivated by both a sense of confidence in Soviet military capabilities and a foreboding about ominous developments in Western policy. In the nuclear sphere, Khrushchev apparently felt some relief that the USSR had finally matched the United States in the development of a hydrogen bomb. In August 1953, the Soviets had tested their first nuclear weapon that involved thermonuclear reactions, but they had not yet developed a true “superbomb,” capable in principle of unlimited explosive force. Only in November 1955 did the USSR test such a weapon, with a yield of 1.6 megatons. The United States, by contrast, had already tested a 10-megaton device in October 1952, and a 15-megaton bomb in February 1954. On the one hand, the Soviets were encouraged by the imminent approach of some rudimentary form of strategic parity; on the other, they were concerned that the U.S. advantage in nuclear technology would nevertheless persist and perhaps increase.<sup>77</sup>

The notion that the nuclear arms race was leading to a stalemate—albeit a dangerous one—was first introduced into the Soviet political discourse by the very

---

<sup>77</sup>David Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb: The Soviet Union and Atomic Energy, 1939-1956* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Chapter 15 deals with the foreign policy of Stalin’s successors, under the shadow of the nuclear arms race.



inventors of Soviet nuclear weapons. In late March 1954, a group of four Soviet physicists, led by Igor Kurchatov, the scientific director of the Soviet atomic project since 1943, drafted a classified report on nuclear weapons.<sup>78</sup> They were motivated in part by widespread international alarm about the dangers of radioactive fall-out from nuclear tests. "The world community is concerned," wrote the scientists, and "such concern is entirely understandable." The scientists argued that "it is clear that the use of atomic weapons on a mass scale will lead to the devastation of the warring countries...In just a few years the stockpiles of atomic explosives will be sufficient to create conditions under which the existence of life over the whole globe will be impossible...We cannot but admit that humanity faces the enormous threat of the end of all life on Earth."<sup>79</sup>

The scientists' views contrasted sharply with the Soviet ideological orthodoxy of the time that insisted on the inevitable victory of "socialism" in any military conflict with "imperialism." When Georgii Malenkov, then Soviet prime minister, adopted the scientists' position and declared that war between the U.S. and USSR "would mean the end of world civilization," Khrushchev denounced his views as "theoretically mistaken and politically harmful."<sup>80</sup> Khrushchev later came to adopt such views himself, after he had secured Malenkov's political defeat, and after he himself had become better informed about the consequences of nuclear war.<sup>81</sup> At that point he began to express confidence in Soviet nuclear deterrence, even if the United States outnumbered the USSR in actual numbers of weapons. But in the mid-1950s, Khrushchev was still quite sensitive to U.S. nuclear developments, despite the emerging stalemate that his scientists had identified.

Some U.S. policymakers assumed that they could use Khrushchev's concern about U.S. military programs to their advantage. In August 1955, for example, Harold Stassen,

---

<sup>78</sup>I.V. Kurchatov, A.I. Alikhanov, I.K. Kikoin, A.P. Vinogradov, "Opasnosti atomnoi voyny i predlozhenie prezidenta Eizekhanera" [The danger of atomic war and President Eisenhower's proposal], TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 30, d. 126, ll. 38ff. This document is discussed in Yuri Smirnov and Vladislav Zubok, "Nuclear Weapons after Stalin's Death: Moscow Enters the H-Bomb Age," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* 4 (Fall 1994), pp. 1, 14-18. I am grateful to Vlad Zubok for sharing his notes from this document with me.

<sup>79</sup>Kurchatov, et al., "Opasnosti atomnoi voyny," pp. 40-41, from Zubok's notes. See also the discussion in Holloway, *Stalin and the Bomb*, pp. 337-339.

<sup>80</sup>Smirnov and Zubok, "Nuclear Weapons after Stalin's Death," pp. 14-15. [Ed. Note: On this, also see transcript of January 1955 plenum in CWIHP *Bulletin* 10.]

<sup>81</sup>James Richter, *Khrushchev's Double Bind: International Pressures and Domestic Coalition Politics* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), esp. chap. 2.

President Eisenhower's special assistant for disarmament, argued at a meeting of the National Security Council that the premise of his work "was that the Soviets would be more amenable during the period when they had, and knew that they had, a lesser power position, than they would be later." The president replied that "he assumed that what was intended here was the same thing that we meant when we talked about negotiation from strength," and he seemed to express his approval of the approach.<sup>82</sup>

It does seem that one of the motives for Soviet interest in disarmament and in a general relaxation in tensions was the prospect of a deteriorating military balance and especially concern about the evolving military situation in Europe.<sup>83</sup> In a speech delivered in February 1955, three months before the USSR presented its UN disarmament plan, Soviet Defense Minister Marshal Zhukov called attention to worrisome European developments, expressing particular concern over the rearmament of West Germany and its impending entry into NATO; over the deployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons with NATO forces; and over the expansion of U.S. military bases.<sup>84</sup>

Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Molotov also followed developments in the West's military policy in considerable detail. The Soviet embassy in Washington, for example sent quarterly and annual reports back to Moscow with extensive information on trends in U.S. economic and military power. On one report from February 1955, Molotov underlined in red pencil the sections describing the nuclearization of U.S. army units, including discussion of the new tactical nuclear systems, such as the "atomic cannon,"

---

<sup>82</sup>Memorandum, 5 August 1955, "Discussion at the 257th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, August 4, 1955," Eisenhower, Dwight D.: Papers as President of the US, 1953-1961 (hereafter Ann Whitman File), DDEL, [NLE case 78-145 #19], p. 5.

<sup>83</sup>Paradoxically, Soviet proponents of negotiated agreements with the U.S. were often obliged in confronting their domestic critics to argue that relative Soviet *strength* allowed for pursuit of arms control, rather than that weakness demanded it. Some Western analysts have accepted these arguments and assumed that the Soviets were confident of their strength at a time when in fact the nuclear balance heavily favored the U.S. and its allies. See Herbert S. Dinerstein, *War and the Soviet Union: Nuclear Weapons and the Revolution in Soviet Military and Political Thinking*, rev. ed. (New York: Praeger, 1962). Soviet moderates were also reluctant to evoke a foreign threat for fear of damaging their program of domestic de-Stalinization. Stalin had used the specter of external enemies to justify internal repression. See Zubok, "SSSR-SShA: put' k peregovoram."

<sup>84</sup>"Rech' tovarishcha G.K. Zhukova" [Speech of Comrade G.K. Zhukov], *Krasnaia zvezda*, 21 February 1955.

being introduced.<sup>85</sup> Some analysts believe that the Soviets sought specifically to trade their numerical strength in conventional forces for the growing U.S. advantages in tactical nuclear weaponry, and to weaken the drive for West German rearmament by unilateral concessions.<sup>86</sup>

Khrushchev was actually quite candid about using unilateral measures of restraint to undermine NATO by reducing the perception of a Soviet threat. As the Soviet leader explained to the Danish prime minister when he visited Moscow in March 1956, "NATO was created as a result of a big military psychosis, when some people painted the Soviet Union in a very unfavorable militarist light before the peoples of the European countries. On our side we also gave a pretext for that." Now, he argued, as a result of reducing the Soviet army, "we have already proved rather convincingly our peacefulness, and will prove it further. That way we will loosen up NATO. We will proceed unilaterally to reduce the armed forces so that everyone will see our peacefulness, and then it would be hard for you to preserve NATO in the face of public opinion."<sup>87</sup>

There is little doubt that some of Khrushchev's initiatives were intended to induce Washington to restrain its military programs so that he in turn could curb Soviet military expenditures. Indeed, that is one of the purposes of pursuing arms agreements. New U.S. weapons might have served as bargaining chips to achieve further Soviet concessions if the Pentagon had been willing to give them up. Does that mean we can attribute Soviet moderation to a U.S. policy of negotiation from strength?

There are two problems with the negotiation-from-strength interpretation. First, in the realm where the Soviets made the greatest concessions—troop reductions and a willingness to reduce in a disarmament agreement down to an equal level to the U.S.—*they* were the ones negotiating from strength. U.S. conventional forces were always smaller than Soviet ones. It is reasonable, however, to consider that the Soviets were

---

<sup>85</sup> AVP, Fond: Ref. po SShA, op. 38, por. 15, papka 276, "Politicheskii otchet posol'stva SSSR v SShA za 1954 god," written on 25 February 1955, sent to Molotov (this is his copy), received and classified "top secret," 3 March 1955. The discussion of NATO military developments is on pp. 42-49 and p. 107.

<sup>86</sup> Bloomfield, et al., *Khrushchev and the Arms Race*, esp. pp. 85-86.

<sup>87</sup> "Zapis besedy Bulganina, Khrushcheva, Mikoiiana, Molotova, s prem'er-ministróm i ministrom inostrannykh del Danii Khansenom," TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 30, d. 163, l. 33, quoted in Vladislav Zubok, "Khrushchev and Divided Germany, 1953-1964," paper presented at the Khrushchev centenary conference, Brown University, 1-3 December 1994, pp. 18-19. I've revised the translation somewhat.

influenced by other aspects of Western military programs that did represent "strength": nuclearization of NATO ground and air forces, plans for rearmament of West Germany, U.S. strategic nuclear superiority.

The second problem with the negotiation-from-strength explanation, however, is that the U.S. was not pursuing that policy. Although U.S. policymakers, including the president and secretary of state, made reference to Soviet weakness and U.S. negotiation from strength—for example, in the weeks preceding the July 1955 Geneva summit—the Eisenhower Administration was not prepared to take advantage of Soviet concessions in order to come to an agreement. Furthermore, such talk of U.S. negotiation from strength appears to have hardened Soviet positions in the disarmament talks.<sup>88</sup> As one of his aides described:

Khrushchev, as the prime mover of the policy of relaxation of international tensions, was finding himself in political difficulties for not being able to show anything for all the moves he had initiated to meet the Western position. Such hard-liners in the leadership group as Vyacheslav Molotov were insisting that Khrushchev was giving away the whole game to Washington. On one occasion I heard him say that naiveté in foreign policy is tantamount to a crime.<sup>89</sup>

Finally, archival documents from the Eisenhower period indicate that the U.S. government—divided internally, but dominated by opponents of arms control—was not at this point interested in a negotiated outcome.<sup>90</sup>

### Conciliation and Reciprocity

What about the alternative explanation—that U.S. concessions induced Soviet moderation? If we look at certain U.S. military programs we could get a superficial impression that U.S. *weakness*, or, let us say, restraint, encouraged the Soviets to adopt restraint themselves. If we consider, for example, the area of conventional forces, we see that reductions in U.S. (and British) forces actually preceded the "unilateral" Soviet reductions announced in 1955 (although perhaps not the unannounced reductions of the previous two years). In this sense calling the Soviet cuts "unilateral" is a misnomer. During 1954, U.S. Army personnel were reduced by 150,000, to 1.33 million from 1.48

---

<sup>88</sup>Coral Bell, *Negotiation from Strength: A Study in the Politics of Power* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1962), pp. 116-121.

<sup>89</sup>Troyanovsky, "Nikita Khrushchev and the Making of Soviet Foreign Policy," pp. 8-9.

million, and the Marines were cut by 23,000, to a force of 220,000. By the fall of 1956, the Army was down to one million and the Marines to about 200,000.<sup>91</sup> Overall, from the time Eisenhower took office in 1953 until the beginning of the Kennedy administration in 1961, Army personnel declined from 1,533,000 to 856,000.<sup>92</sup>

Yet, initial appearances in this case are deceiving. In 1953, when the Eisenhower Administration came into office, the United States was still at war in Korea. Much of the reduction in 1954 actually represented demobilization of troops involved in the war, following the armistice the previous year. If we look at the area of apparently greatest concern to the Soviets—deployment of U.S. troops in Europe—the decline is much less dramatic (Table 8). The minor U.S. reductions in Europe did, however, coincide with decisions of several NATO allies, on domestic economic and political grounds, to pare down the ambitious plans for a conventional buildup (the so-called Lisbon force goals). But they also coincided with plans for the creation of a 500,000-strong *Bundeswehr* and the nuclearization of NATO forces, prospects that the Soviets viewed with trepidation.<sup>93</sup>

**Table 8: U.S. Military Personnel in Europe, 1950-1964**

Year	Personnel (Thousands)
1950	145
1951	346
1952	405
1953	427
1954	404
1955	405
1956	398

<sup>90</sup>Evangelista, "Cooperation Theory and Disarmament."

<sup>91</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, *The Common Defense: Strategic Programs in National Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961, paperback ed., 1966), p. 79.

<sup>92</sup>Bell, *Negotiation from Strength*, p. 138.

<sup>93</sup>Robert E. Osgood, *NATO: The Entangling Alliance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), chap. 4.

1957	393
1958	380
1959	380
1960	379
1961	417
1962	416
1963	380
1964	374

Source: Richard D. Lawrence and Jeffrey Record, *U.S. Force Structure in NATO: An Alternative* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1974), 93.

From a strictly military standpoint, these developments were not likely to have convinced the Soviets unambiguously that the threat from the West had declined sufficiently to reduce their own forces. Yet Soviet leaders were clearly aware of U.S. developments. Reports from the Soviet embassy in Washington to the Foreign Ministry in 1954 reported a reduction in the U.S. Army of 200 thousand troops scheduled to be completed by the beginning of 1955, with further reductions down to a total U.S. military force of 2.85 million toward the middle of 1956. They also noted the *growth* in airforce personnel by some 50,000, with a goal of 975,000 by mid-1956. They reported that NATO armed forces consisted of 100 divisions, half of which were combat ready, and gave details (largely culled from the *New York Times*) of the alliance's plans to expand its ground and air forces and its system of air bases. Foreign Minister Molotov underlined several of these points in red, including the argument that the U.S. conventional-force reductions would not harm combat effectiveness because they came mainly from service and administrative units and because the troops were receiving nuclear weapons.<sup>94</sup>

<sup>94</sup>"Politicheskii otchet posol'stva SSSR v SShA za 1954 god," pp. 42-49, 107. For the details of NATO's planned expansion, see the first quarterly report for 1954, drafted by Anatolii Dobrynin, in AVP, Ref. po SShA, op. 38, por. 14, papka 276, 15 April 1954, pp. 25-26.

Molotov was never a proponent of Soviet moderation.<sup>95</sup> He was particularly drawn to the report's conclusion that the United States "is not interested in solving the problem of atomic weapons by agreement with the USSR" (underlined in red) and that one should not expect any improvement in U.S.-Soviet relations any time soon (marked twice with red).<sup>96</sup> Other leaders could, however, have used information about the reduction of the U.S. armed forces—even if they were just routine adjustments to the end of the Korean War—to argue for similar Soviet measures.

Other events, however, do seem to have convinced at least some of the Soviet leadership that the international environment was not as threatening in the mid-1950s as it had been a few years earlier. The end of the Korean War in 1953, the willingness of Western leaders to meet the new Soviet leadership in Geneva in 1955, the Western decision to take into account Soviet security concerns by guaranteeing Austrian neutrality in the 1955 settlement, all combined with the Soviet achievement of a rudimentary thermonuclear capability, made Khrushchev and some of his colleagues willing to risk some unilateral gestures of restraint.<sup>97</sup>

#### **COULD U.S. POLICY HAVE "HELPED" KHRUSHCHEV?**

Unfortunately, however, Western policy did not encourage the continuation of such restraint. The reduction in Western conventional forces in the 1950s was not represented as inducement or reciprocation for Soviet gestures. Rather, Western military and political leaders stressed the arming of the remaining forces with nuclear weapons, which, they boasted, would provide "more bang for the buck." Khrushchev later adopted a similar tack in justifying Soviet reductions. This approach was counterproductive for both sides, since it portrayed the cutbacks as a function of military expediency rather than as gestures of restraint. Later, during the Kennedy Administration, U.S. policy explicitly favored a conventional-force buildup (in addition to a nuclear one), at a time when Khrushchev was pushing for increasingly radical reforms and reductions in Soviet forces.

---

<sup>95</sup>F. Chuev, *Sto sorok besed s Molotovym* [One hundred forty conversations with Molotov] (Moscow: Terra, 1991); Troyanovsky, "Nikita Khrushchev and the Making of Soviet Foreign Policy."

<sup>96</sup>"Politicheskii otchet posol'stva SSSR v SShA za 1954 god," p. 92.

<sup>97</sup>Richter, *Khrushchev's Double Bind*, esp. pp. 68-73; Troyanovsky, "Nikita Khrushchev and the Making of Soviet Foreign Policy."

## The Eisenhower Years

During the second half of the 1950s both the U.S. and Britain were intent on minimizing the significance of the Soviet troop reductions. Following the August 1955 reductions, for example, officials at the British Foreign Office expressed concern that the Soviets would seek a quid pro quo at the upcoming UN disarmament negotiations: "The answer to any tactic of this kind should be that the Western powers demobilised their troops in 1945, and that many of the men since recalled as the result of the Korean War have already been released without any fuss."<sup>98</sup> In the United States, Harold Stassen's staff proposed a similar response to potential Soviet initiatives to reduce conventional forces: The U.S. should point out that its troops had already demobilized after World War II, had maintained an army of only a half million men until the Korean War broke out, and—unlike the USSR—made public the annual size of its armed forces: "This record demonstrates the willingness of the United States to reduce arms when circumstances are propitious for world peace."<sup>99</sup>

In the wake of the Soviet announcement in May 1956, Stassen prepared a position paper for President Eisenhower and relevant departments and agencies with his suggestions for responses to the Soviet initiatives. Some of the responses Stassen proposed were cautiously positive and intended to encourage further progress in arms control, but ultimately only the negative recommendations found expression in U.S. policy. Stassen suggested, for example, that Washington both welcome the Soviet gesture and press for acceptance of preferred U.S. arms-control measures, mainly concerning aerial inspection. He also recommended that if the Soviet reduction were substantial the U.S. should review its own force levels and military aid to its allies, but he did not request the president to approve such measures at the time.

Stassen's suggestions for positive responses were overshadowed by recommendations for how to prevent the USSR from gaining a propaganda coup for its

---

<sup>98</sup>Comments on cover of Folder NS 1202/9, File 116729, in FO 371/113453-118673, 1955 General Correspondence: Political, PRO.

<sup>99</sup>Position Paper on Probable Soviet Positions and Proposed US Responses, Special Staff Study for the President - NSC Action No. 1328, DCS/12-R.1, 29 February 1956, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for Disarmament (Harold Stassen): Records, 1955-58, Box 3: DCS Position Papers (8), p. 4, DDEL.



initiative. In particular, he sought to “deflate any exaggerated Soviet claims” about “the true extent and real significance” of the reductions and “to minimize [the] impression that [the] reduction is solely motivated by [a] Soviet desire to reduce tension.” He went so far as to argue that in the nuclear age it was more dangerous to have small armies than large ones if that meant that the demobilized soldiers were at work building nuclear weapons, missiles, and bombers.<sup>100</sup> This line of argument was taken up by Secretary of State John Foster Dulles as well. At a press conference the day after the Soviet announcement of reductions, Dulles repeatedly deprecated Moscow’s initiative as insignificant. When one exasperated reporter suggested that Dulles would prefer that the Soviets not demobilize their soldiers, he answered that in fact he would “rather have them standing around doing guard duty than making atomic bombs.” Some analysts have described this response as indicating Dulles’s inherent distrust of Soviet motives and have contrasted it to Stassen’s more positive reception.<sup>101</sup> It seems, however, that this clever dismissal of the Soviet initiative originated with Stassen himself.

Six weeks after the announcement of the reductions, Stassen did try to take advantage of the Soviet initiative to promote his disarmament proposals to the president.<sup>102</sup> By then, however, it was too late. The administration had already dismissed the Soviet gesture as a propaganda stunt—a reaction not likely to encourage further Soviet moderation or even indicate any serious U.S. interest in negotiations.<sup>103</sup>

Western policymakers appear not to have taken into consideration that their countries’ behavior could have any influence on the continuation of Soviet restraint. In particular, they found it hard to believe that the Soviets could perceive a threat from the

---

<sup>100</sup>Memorandum, Stassen to Eisenhower and Departments and Agencies Concerned, “Recommended Guidelines for Anticipation of and Response to Probable Soviet Reduction of Armed Force Levels,” 14 May 1956, White House Office, Office of the Special Assistant for Disarmament (Harold Stassen): Records, 1955-58, Box 1: D[isarmament] P[roblems] C[ommittee] Notes [64-99] (1), p. 3, DDEL.

<sup>101</sup>Ole R. Holsti, “Cognitive Dynamics and Images of the Enemy: Dulles and Russia,” in David J. Finlay, Ole R. Holsti, and Richard R. Fagen, *Enemies in Politics* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1967), pp. 61-62.

<sup>102</sup>Memorandum, Stassen to Eisenhower, 29 June 1956, Subject: Report Pursuant to NSC Action 1553, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Subject Series, Alphabetical Subseries, Box 11: Disarmament [Vol. I] (7), DDEL.

<sup>103</sup>See, e.g., the background press statement prepared by the President’s Special Committee on Disarmament Problems, Joseph S. Toner, Executive Secretary, in response to the May 1956 announcement, in Office of the Staff Secretary, Subject Series, Alphabetical Subseries, Box 11, Folder: “Disarmament [Vol. I] (6) [May-June 1956],” DDEL.

West, the alleviation of which would induce them to reduce their own military efforts. In July 1955, Secretary Dulles, for example, reported to the National Security Council his conviction that the Soviets were not concerned about Western military plans. His evidence? At the summit meeting earlier that month, according to Dulles, members of the U.S. delegation had tried unsuccessfully to get the Soviet representatives to explain their concern about possible German reunification—"did they fear the twelve German divisions now planned, or did they fear NATO armies on a Soviet frontier?" The U.S. representatives evidently told their Soviet counterparts "that the West was prepared to reassure the Soviets if they were fearful of German aggression or the revival of German militarism." When the Soviets declined to pursue the issue, Dulles "concluded that the Russians did not really fear German rearmament or German military power," but were concerned mainly about the effect that the loss of East Germany would have on the remaining communist regimes in the Soviet bloc.<sup>104</sup> Following the first publicly announced Soviet troop reductions in August 1955, Dulles stated in a press conference that the Soviet action demonstrated the USSR's recognition that the United States would not be an aggressor.<sup>105</sup> Thus, Dulles and other Western policymakers indicated that they did not think concessions on German rearmament or U.S. military programs would contribute to further Soviet restraint.

Ironically, many of the policies that President Eisenhower (if not his administration) favored could have bolstered Khrushchev's efforts. It is generally agreed now that, especially in comparison with his immediate predecessor and successors, Khrushchev advocated a relatively modest nuclear force as well as sharply reduced conventional forces. On the requirements for nuclear missiles Khrushchev expressed his opinion in typically colorful fashion: "Missiles are not cucumbers, one cannot eat them and one does not require more than a certain number in order to ward off an attack."<sup>106</sup> Eisenhower, who oversaw an unprecedentedly massive buildup of nuclear-weapons production facilities, weapons, and delivery vehicles, seems at times to have been inclined

---

<sup>104</sup>Memorandum, 29 July 1955, "Discussion at the 256th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, July 28, 1955," Ann Whitman File, DDEL, pp. 4-5.

<sup>105</sup>Press conference, 16 August 1955.

toward notions of "minimum deterrence" compatible with Khrushchev's—and sometimes expressed with equal color: In August 1955, he told the members of his National Security Council that "he thought we should develop a few of these missiles as a threat, but not 1000 or more...if the Russians can fire 1000 a day at us and we can fire 1000 a day at them, then he personally would want to take off for the Argentine."<sup>107</sup> A few weeks earlier he had expressed the same view to Soviet premier Bulganin at the summit meeting in Geneva: "He said that the development of modern weapons was such that a country which used them genuinely risked destroying itself. Since the prevailing winds went east to west and not north to south a major war would destroy the Northern Hemisphere and he had no desire to leave all life and civilization to the Southern Hemisphere."<sup>108</sup>

The Soviet leaders made comparable statements about the suicidal consequences of using nuclear weapons. Even top military commanders apparently held such views. In his top secret report to Marshal Zakharov, for example, Gen. Ivashutin wrote that "thermonuclear war destroys everything in its path, without sorting it out." He argued that the "imperialist camp" risked more destruction than the Soviet Union and its allies, but he did not define such an outcome as "victory." Rather, he urged that "in order to preserve life on earth, the centers of world civilization and culture, it is necessary not to allow thermonuclear war to break out. Everyone on earth, every person, regardless of which camp he belongs to, has the same degree of interest in doing this."<sup>109</sup> Ivashutin expressed these views in the midst of his otherwise rather cold-blooded 120-page discussion of the prosecution of war in the nuclear-missile age. But given that the report was intended solely for his military colleague Zakharov, the general apparently felt free to express his true feelings. They were much like the feelings General Eisenhower sometimes expressed.

---

<sup>106</sup>N.S. Khrushchev, *Pravda*, 29 May 1960. Sergei Khrushchev provides similar evidence of his father's views in "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo."

<sup>107</sup>Memorandum, 5 August 1955, Discussion at the 257th Meeting of the National Security Council, Thursday, August 4, 1955, Eisenhower Papers, 1953-1961, Ann Whitman File, DDEL, pp. 11-12.

<sup>108</sup>"United States Delegation to the Conference of Heads of Governments, Geneva, Switzerland - July 1955," Memorandum for the Record, 18 July 1955, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary. Records, 1952-61, International Trips and Meetings Series, Box 2: Memoranda of President's Conversations—Geneva 1955. p. 5, DDEL.

<sup>109</sup>Ivashutin, "Material o razvitii voennogo iskusstva v usloviakh vedeniia raketno-iadernoi voiny po sovremennym predstavleniiam," p. 347.

Concerning conventional forces, there seems to have been considerable similarity in the positions of Khrushchev and Eisenhower. Towards the end of his tenure in office, the Soviet leader became increasingly critical of large ground forces. In September 1964 he abolished the position of commander of ground forces, subordinating them directly to the General Staff, and he spoke favorably of a territorial militia system.<sup>110</sup> Eisenhower cut back U.S. army strength considerably, and evidently wanted to do more. In August 1959, he told Gen. Lauris Norstad, the NATO supreme commander, "that he felt there is strong reason for the United States to start pulling some of its forces out of Europe," without, as Norstad proposed, waiting for a disarmament agreement.<sup>111</sup>

Eisenhower's view on zonal disarmament arrangements, such as the Eden plan, was initially sympathetic, and he seemed to think there might be some common ground with the Soviets, especially if the Soviet plan for ground control posts could be combined with Eisenhower's preference for aerial inspection.<sup>112</sup> As he wrote to Gen. Alfred Gruenther, "Anthony's proposal and mine, far from being mutually antagonistic, were intended to be complimentary [sic]."<sup>113</sup> Yet, as with most aspects of disarmament policy, the Eisenhower administration was sharply divided. At the Geneva summit in July 1955, Eden pressed the president privately—after Secretary Dulles left the room—to agree with the Soviets on a disarmament zone in central Europe.<sup>114</sup> But Dulles was skeptical. He instructed U.S. representatives not even to discuss such proposals at the UN disarmament subcommittee; in his view, the subject was too closely linked to political issues concerning the status of Germany and should be discussed only at the level of foreign ministers.<sup>115</sup> Even Dulles's skepticism paled in comparison to the resistance of Adm. Radford and the

---

<sup>110</sup>Clemens, "Soviet Disarmament Proposals and the Cadre-Territorial Army;" Clemens, "The Soviet Militia in the Missile Age;" Wolfe, *Soviet Power and Europe*, p. 464.

<sup>111</sup>"Memorandum of Conference with the President, August 24, 1959," 25 August 1959, White House Office, Office of the Staff Secretary: Records, 1952-61, Box 5: NATO (2), p. 3, DDEL.

<sup>112</sup>See, e.g., the discussions at the NSC meetings on 13 October 1955, pp. 5-11 and 22 December 1955, pp. 10-13, in memoranda dated 14 October 1955 and 23 December 1955 respectively, Ann Whitman File, DDEL.

<sup>113</sup>Letter, Eisenhower to Gruenther, 25 July 1955, DDE Diary #11, DDEL. Thanks to Bart Bernstein for this document.

<sup>114</sup>Memorandum of Conversation at Breakfast, 20 July 1955, Ann Whitman File, International Series, Box 1: Geneva Conference July 18-23, 1955 [#1] (3), DDEL.

<sup>115</sup>Telegram, Dulles to Lodge and Stassen, 30 August 1955, Dulles, John Foster: Papers, 1952-59, John Foster Dulles Chronological Series, Box 12: John Foster Dulles Chronological August 1955 (1), DDEL.

military.<sup>116</sup> Finally, in addition to these obstacles, the Eden plan, the Rapacki plan, and related proposals for European disarmament zones, foundered on West German opposition: Konrad Adenauer's government feared that formal disarmament measures in central Europe would give Western sanction to the status quo of a divided Germany and Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe.<sup>117</sup>

Despite an apparent congruence in the views of their top leaders, the U.S. and USSR never came to agreement on limiting nuclear or conventional forces during the Eisenhower years.

### The Kennedy Administration

Even though the actions of the Eisenhower administration were not particularly helpful in advancing Khrushchev's agenda of restraining the Soviet military, those of the Kennedy administration were even worse. Kennedy's "whiz kids" came into office with a mandate to correct what they had criticized as the deficiencies in Eisenhower's military policies: namely, inadequate attention to, and overreliance on, the nuclear deterrent. The first criticism was reflected in the spurious "missile gap" controversy and the Kennedy Administration's acceleration of the Eisenhower nuclear buildup. The second was the critique of "massive retaliation" and the subsequent program for increasing conventional forces and enhancing capabilities for "flexible response" in Europe and "limited war" elsewhere.<sup>118</sup>

From Khrushchev's standpoint, the timing of the Kennedy military buildup could not have been worse. It is certainly plausible to suppose that a more moderate U.S. approach, one that recognized the battle that Khrushchev was waging against the Soviet "military-industrial complex," could have given the Soviet leader more time to carry out

---

<sup>116</sup>See, especially, the memorandum of the NSC meeting on 13 October 1955, cited above.

<sup>117</sup>Telegram, Bruce to Dulles, 24 July 1957, reporting a conversation with the German ambassador to London, [MR 85-465 #5], DDEL; Memorandum to the Secretary of State for the President, from Harold Stassen, "Report and Recommendations," 7 October 1957, Ann Whitman File, ACW Diary Series, Administration Series, Box 35: Stassen, Harold E. 1957 (1), p. 3, DDEL; *Current Foreign Relations*, Department of State Policy Report, Issue No. 45, 12 November 1958 (originally classified "secret"), Staff Secretary Records, 1952-61, Subject Series, State Department Subseries, Folder: State Department - September 1958-January 1959 (3), pp. 5-8, DDEL.

<sup>118</sup>For a forceful statement of this critique from a disgruntled member of the Eisenhower administration, see Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (Harper & Brothers, 1960).

his foundering domestic reforms.<sup>119</sup> Of course, Khrushchev bears some of the blame himself for his aggressively blustering behavior over Suez, the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and perhaps especially his threats and ultimata over Berlin.<sup>120</sup> In retrospect, one can understand this behavior as part of Khrushchev's internal political maneuvering, ultimately geared toward a relaxation and demilitarization of Soviet domestic and international politics.<sup>121</sup> At the time, however, such actions appeared quite threatening to Kennedy Administration officials, who in any case, were already predisposed for political and economic reasons toward a military buildup.<sup>122</sup>

In his last year in office, Khrushchev revealed ever more clearly his intentions vis-à-vis the Soviet military, and he seized every opportunity to promote his program of military reform.<sup>123</sup> The signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty in 1963, for example, gave Khrushchev a chance to press for further reductions of armed forces and military spending, in the wake of what he consistently sought to portray as a major improvement in the international atmosphere. But by the time the Kennedy Administration began to take the prospect of cooperation with Khrushchev seriously, it was too late.<sup>124</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The striking thing about Khrushchev's troop reductions is how short-lived they were. The Brezhnev leadership reversed the personnel cuts, adding nearly a million soldiers to the armed forces, and began massive serial production of the full range of conventional weapons. Khrushchev's tentative advocacy of "minimum deterrence" was

---

<sup>119</sup>The strongest expression of this view is Alexander Yanov, "In the Grip of the Adversarial Paradigm: The Case of Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev in Retrospect," in Robert O. Crummey, ed., *Reform in Russia and the U.S.S.R.* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), pp. 156-181; for supporting argumentation about the Kennedy military buildup, Minde and Hennessey, "Reform of the Soviet Military," in *ibid.*, pp. 182-206.

<sup>120</sup>For an account that stresses this argument, see William Taubman, "Khrushchev and Detente: Reform in the International Context," in *ibid.*, pp. 143-155.

<sup>121</sup>See, especially, Richter, *Khrushchev's Double Bind*; and Sergei Khrushchev, *Nikita Khrushchev: Krizisy i rakety* [Nikita Khrushchev: Crises and rockets], 2 vols. (Moscow: Novosti, 1994); and his "Nikita Khrushchev i voennoe stroitel'stvo."

<sup>122</sup>Desmond Ball, *Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

<sup>123</sup>Matthew P. Gallagher, "Military Manpower: A Case Study," *Problems of Communism* 13:3 (May/June 1964), pp. 53-62; Minde and Hennessey, "Reform of the Soviet Military."

<sup>124</sup>Glenn T. Seaborg with Benjamin S. Loeb, *Kennedy, Khrushchev, and the Test Ban* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981); Christer Jönsson, *Soviet Bargaining Behavior: The Nuclear Test Ban Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979).

also declared a failure as Brezhnev sponsored a major expansion of Soviet nuclear capabilities.

In retrospect, Khrushchev made two particularly serious mistakes that undercut his attempts at restraining the arms race. First, his reliance on nuclear deterrence and denigration of conventional forces made it easy for skeptical Western politicians to argue that the troop reductions constituted not a conciliatory gesture but a purely self-interested expedient. Second, his attempts to demonstrate that Soviet nuclear power could compensate for the neglect of conventional air, ground, and naval forces led him to exaggerate Soviet capabilities. By brandishing nuclear missiles—even ones that did not even exist yet—Khrushchev expected to kill two birds with one stone: He thought he could achieve deterrence of the West on the cheap, and perhaps some diplomatic victories into the bargain; and he thought he could quiet the criticisms of the opponents of his troop reductions, by stressing the preeminence of nuclear weapons. What he failed to realize is how counterproductive his missile diplomacy would be—that it would provoke a U.S. missile buildup well beyond any conception of “minimum deterrence” and simultaneously undermine the sincerity of his troop cuts.

A comparison to the more successful and durable troop reductions of the Gorbachev era is instructive. In that case, transnational groups promoted “non-offensive defense” as a means of reducing conventional forces and enhancing security, without increasing reliance on nuclear weapons.<sup>125</sup> One might speculate that if transnational actors of the 1950s had promoted an intellectual construct as attractive as nonoffensive defense they might have given Khrushchev some arguments to bolster the case for the security-enhancing benefits of his troop reductions. They might thereby have exerted a moderating influence on Khrushchev’s pro-nuclear stance, decreasing the West’s perception of a Soviet threat, and improving the possibilities for some reciprocal restraint on the Western side.

---

<sup>125</sup>See Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Ideas Do Not Float Freely: Transnational Coalitions, Domestic Structures, and the End of the Cold War,” *International Organization* 48:2 (Spring 1994), pp. 185-214. I discuss this case in my forthcoming book, *Taming the Bear: Transnational Relations and the Demise of the Soviet Threat*.

### About the Author

Matthew Evangelista is Associate Professor of Government and Director of the International Relations Concentration at Cornell University. Until 1996 he was Associate Professor of Political Science and faculty associate of the Center for Russian and East European Studies at the University of Michigan. During 1993-95 he was visiting scholar at the Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard University. He is the author of *Innovation and the Arms Race* (Cornell University Press, 1988) and numerous articles in such journals as *World Politics*, *International Organization*, *International Security*, and *The Nation*. This Working Paper is intended to form the basis for a chapter in his book-in-progress, entitled *Taming the Bear: Transnational Relations and the Demise of the Soviet Threat*.

The author expresses gratitude to several institutions for support of his archival research in Moscow, London, and Abilene: the Cold War International History Project, the Council on Economic Priorities, the National Council for Soviet and East European Research, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the U.S. Institute of Peace. For sharing documents and advice, he thanks Jim Hershberg, David Holloway, Mark Kramer, Aleksei Titkov, Vladislav Zubok, and Mikhail Zuev. For help in processing requests for declassification of U.S. documents, he thanks the staff at the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library and for research assistance he thanks Marc Bennett.