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## **The evolution of Stalin's postwar perception of external threat**

One of the distinctive features of the »new history« of the Cold War, which is being written by the international community of scholars on the basis of new archival documents, is a tendency to pay more attention to the role of »perceptions« and »misperceptions« of the Western and Soviet political leaders in the origins and escalation of the postwar global confrontation.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective it seems rather interesting to analyze documents of Stalin's personal archive. Despite the fact that a considerable part of these documents are still not available to researchers, they could define more precisely our notions about Joseph Stalin's anxiety over the foreign policy of the United States and West European countries, which put its imprint on Soviet diplomatic methods and tactics in the first years of the Cold War.

It is common knowledge that Stalin's distrust of the motives of Western powers' behavior persevered even in the years of the Grand Alliance, to say nothing of the postwar period. Among a multitude of threats that existed in the Kremlin master's perceptions of the outside world during the postwar years the »German threat« and particularly the »threat of war« dominated. However, during the first three years after the end of the Second World War, when a degree of confrontation between the USSR and the Western countries was at the stage of a »cold peace« and did not acquire the scale of the Cold War utterance of Stalin concerning the external threat during his meetings with American, British and other foreign statesmen and politicians were much more restrained than the official Soviet propaganda. Churchill's speech in Fulton, on the 5<sup>th</sup> of March, 1946, contributed to a heightening of Stalin's suspicions about the aggressive intentions of the former allies. Besides, an interview to a correspondent of the Communist Party's Central Committee newspaper »Pravda«, in which Stalin estimated Churchill's statements as a »directive to war, appeal for war«<sup>2</sup>, the head of the Soviet government decided to express his opinion once more on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 1946, in his conversation with the new American Ambassador, General W. Smith.

The American diplomat emphasized that President H. Truman and he himself understood very well the desire of the Soviet Union to ensure its security

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<sup>1</sup> See: Westad, Odd Arne (Ed.): *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*. London 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Pravda, 14. March 1946.

after such a bloody war, but that they were very disturbed by the Soviet's methods for achieving this aim (military pressure on the Iranian government, territorial claims to Turkey, Far Eastern policy), and in this connection Smith asked Stalin: why was the Soviet Union so troubled by »the possibility of aggression against it?« Stalin, making reference to a historical precedent of the anti-Soviet intervention of 1918, answered that »the reason for this are Churchill and his friends, their statements against the USSR.«<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, warning the USA against blocking with Great Britain on an anti-Soviet basis, Stalin underlined that the emerging disagreements between the Soviet Union and the United States »were not frightening for him because »if mutual desire exists« they could be settled.«<sup>4</sup>

A quotation from another of Stalin's conversations from 1946 illustrates quite well his desire to continue co-operation with the Western allies. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of July he received the General Secretary of the United Nations Trygve Lie and they discussed the Iranian question and the attitude of the UN Security Council as well as the possibility of abusing the right of veto by Great Powers. Stalin did not exclude a situation where the United States and Great Britain would use this right of veto against the Soviet Union, but he spared no effort to persuade his counterpart that protracted co-operation could not be without frictions between the partners. As if to himself Stalin said that »he, Cde. Stalin, doesn't fear neither contradictions, nor conflicts. He, Cde. Stalin, isn't afraid of American propaganda. It is necessary to proceed from the fact that contradictions will appear inevitably. As for the propaganda against the Soviet Union, speaking between you and me,« said the Kremlin's master »it causes the Soviet Union not only harm but benefits as well.«<sup>5</sup> It is not quite clear what Stalin meant when he spoke about benefits, perhaps he used the hostile propaganda as a pretext for the postwar consolidation of Soviet society. In any case the position of Stalin was rather realistic and the manner of his talk was very friendly and outspoken in contrast to the next conversation with Lie, which took place in May 1950, when the Cold War as a threat to peace became the subject of discussion.

Thus, at the beginning of 1946, Stalin estimated the »threat« to the national security of the USSR, coming from the Western countries, as a possible one but more a potential one. However, in his conversation with Ambassador

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<sup>3</sup> The record of Cde. I. V. Stalin's conversation with the Ambassador of the USA W. Smith, 4 April 1946. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv sotsial'noi i politicheskoi istorii [Russian State Archive of Social and Political History] (hereafter: RGASPI), f. 558 (the personal Archive of I. V. Stalin), op. 11, d. 382, l. 23.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. l. 11.

<sup>5</sup> The Record of Cde. I. V. Stalin's the conversation with the General Secretary of the United Nations Organization Trygve Lie, 23 July 1946. RGASPI, f.558, op. 11, d. 353, ll. 11, 12.

Smith, Stalin motivated Soviet activity in the Middle East, in Eastern Europe and the Balkans by a reference to the permanent »German threat«. »It is necessary to have in mind,« the Soviet leader said, »that Germany has not abandoned its claims, that it, as well as Japan, will again raise to its feet despite any hard conditions which the allies will impose on it. We need to be ready for this, the Soviet Union doesn't want to be caught off guard.«<sup>6</sup>

To a certain degree it was the »syndrome of the 22 June, 1941« but apart from the real fear of the Soviet leader, the »German threat« was one of the principal elements in Stalin's scheme of ensuring post-war Soviet security based on a system of bilateral treaties with eastern European countries and between them, aimed at preventing an invasion of hostile states. The idea of preventing the »German threat« played a very important role in motivating the necessity of these treaties. As it was stressed in one Russian article, devoted to the Soviet factor in post-war Eastern Europe, actions by Western powers aimed at the revival of Germany »produced a negative effect, no matter whether such a threat was real or just a political-psychological phantom.«<sup>7</sup> One more remark, Stalin's later attitude towards the »German threat« shows that, as relations between the former allies became more and more strained, he began to perceive and interpret it not as a threat by itself but in a linkage with the Western bloc's policy and American expansionist intentions in Europe.

The changes in Stalin's interpretation of the external »threat« found their reflection during the process of preparation of East European bilateral treaties. According to the published Diary of G. Dimitrov (who, after the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, was the head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party in 1944–1945 and then headed the government of Bulgaria) on the 16<sup>th</sup> of October, 1947, the Kremlin gave him a new directive concerning the conclusion of treaties between Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary and Albania (and only after that between these countries and the Soviet Union). In comparison with the conclusion of previous treaties, the current situation had changed: »Now mutual assistance is needed against any kind of aggression, not only German.«<sup>8</sup>

The new Soviet formula of mutual obligations of the signatories in case of any aggression were included in all bilateral treaties between »small countries«

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<sup>6</sup> The record of Cde. I. V. Stalin's conversation with the Ambassador of the USA W. Smith, 4 April 1946. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 382, l. 19.

<sup>7</sup> Murashko, G. P., A. F. Noskova: Soviet Factor in Post-War Eastern Europe (1945–1948), in: Soviet Foreign Policy in the Cold War Years (1945–1985). New Perception (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnoshenia [International Relations], 1995), p. 74.

<sup>8</sup> Georgi Dimitrov Diary (9 March 1933 – 6 February 1949). Sofia 1997, pp. 581, 586.

signed in November 1947 until January 1948. But at the beginning of February 1948 the Soviet government decided to return the previous formula for aggressor to the forthcoming treaties: »Germany or its allies.«<sup>9</sup> In the light of explanations, which I. Stalin and V. Molotov gave to the Bulgarian and Yugoslav communist leaders during their meeting at the Kremlin on the 10<sup>th</sup> of February, 1948, (because of serious disagreements between Moscow and its closest allies in the socialist camp), the return to the previous formula for treaties between eastern European countries and between them and the Soviet Union becomes more clear. As Stalin looked at Western intentions towards the Soviet Union through the lenses of fear and suspicion, apprehensions that the potential »enemy« might be provoked to establish a military-political bloc of its own was not at the last place.<sup>10</sup>

The documents from Stalin's archive confirmed the historians' supposition that the Berlin crisis of 1948–1949 was, to a considerable degree, provoked by the desire of the Soviet leader and his collaborators to force the USA, Britain and France to refrain from the realization of the decision of the London conference in 1948, concerning the formation of a separate West German state. In the thinking of the Soviet leaders the prospect of integration of an independent West Germany into the Western bloc considerably strengthened the »German threat«. As Stalin admitted in his conversation with three high ranking Western diplomats during their meeting at the Kremlin on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of August, 1948, one of the main reasons for Soviet »defensive measures« in Berlin on transport restrictions was not only the introduction of a special currency for the city, but the decisions of the London conference about »the division of Germany into two states«. In Stalin's view it was necessary to suspend (or even cancel) the implementation of these documents until the meeting of the four powers and achieving an agreement on the unification of Germany. In contrast to the Western diplomats' opinion, the Soviet leader considered that the formation of the West German state would become a hard obstacle on the way to the settlement of the German question. »If they do it«, noted Stalin, »what could we talk about then? But maybe it is even better that one Western zone came into being instead of three zones«<sup>11</sup> (in other words like one Eastern zone).

Since the establishment of the Atlantic Alliance, the announcement of the »Shuman Plan« and the »Pleven Plan« (1950), and particularly after decisions

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<sup>9</sup> Gibianskii, L. Ya., V. C. Volkov: On the Threshold of the First division in the »Socialist Camp«, *Istoricheskii Arkhiv* [Historical Archive], 1997, #4, p. 118.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 98, 100, 116.

<sup>11</sup> The record of Cde. I. V. Stalin's conversation with the Ambassador of the USA Smith, the representative of British government Robertson and the French Ambassador Chatinot, 2. August 1948. RGASPI, f. 558, op.11, d. 382, l. 62, 64, 70.

on the remilitarization of West Germany and the involvement of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) in the European Army had been taken by the New York session (September 1950) and in subsequent meetings of foreign ministers of the USA, Great Britain and France, the »German threat« became closely associated in Soviet leaders' mentality with the hostile policy of the North Atlantic bloc and its preparations for a new war. The new Soviet approach is well illustrated by the episode of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' (MFA) work on the Soviet note to France (as the initiator of the »Shuman Plan«). But during a long period of its preparation, which lasted since April till September 1951 – and Stalin was regularly informed on the drafts – , such events as failure of the preliminary meeting of deputy foreign ministers in Paris (March – June 1951), the beginning of negotiations on the European Army and others had already taken place and the note was transformed to a protest against both the »Shuman« and the »Pleven« Plans.

In the final version of the draft (7. September), a large part concerning NATO, its aggressive aims and preparation for a new war appeared for the first time. At the end of this part of the text it was said that the main task of the U.S. government, which along with Great Britain dominated in NATO, was »to include the regular German Army, now being restored in West Germany, into the armed forces of the North Atlantic bloc«. And particularly from this perspective the »Shuman Plan« was estimated as »aimed at the revival of West German military industry« and in this capacity »as a direct supplement to the »Pleven Plan«, opening the venue for the restoration of German militarism«. <sup>12</sup> On 10 September 1951 the Politburo approved this draft with some editorial corrections and next day it was sent to the French government. Thus in the 1950s the »German threat« was interpreted in Soviet official estimates in close connection with NATO's threat, and both of them with the danger of a future world war.

A »threat of war« was an integral component of Stalin's perception of Western behavior after the victory over Hitlerite Germany, because, in accordance with Marxism-Leninism dogmas, war was immanent to imperialism as an instrument of its expansionist policy. The thesis about a fatal necessity of war was supplemented in Soviet leaders' official statements by another one that in a future war, unleashed by imperialism, capitalism would be defeated and socialism will win in the whole world. It was articulated in G. Malenkov's speech on 6. November 1949 and when he dared to change this thesis by a realistic utterance of 12. March 1954 that a »new world war due to modern

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<sup>12</sup> A draft of the Soviet government note to the government of France, 6. September 1951. Arkhiv vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Archive of Foreign Policy of Russian Federation], f. 07, op. 24, p. 33, d. 388, l. 188.

weapons means a ruin of civilization»<sup>13</sup> the Soviet leadership blamed him for this theoretical mistake, especially at the CPSU CC Plenum of January 1955. Molotov, formulating a »correct« (since Lenin's and Stalin's time) position on this question, said that the Party theory and its political work »directed to transform the third world war into a civil war of the working class against bourgeoisie, for the overthrow of capitalism«.<sup>14</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1945 Stalin considered that it was possible to avoid a new war for another 10 to 15 years.<sup>15</sup> Rather eloquent evidence concerning Stalin's informal views on the issue of war in the postwar years can be found in his conversation with Leo Krizhitskii, chairman of the All Slavic Congress in the USA. During their meeting in the Kremlin on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, 1946, Krizhitskii raised the question of the congress resolution by Z. Okoinskii (an American of Polish birth) on a fast withdrawal of American troops from Europe to begin their training for a future war with the USSR. In his reply Stalin said: »If any government of those Great Powers which defeated Germany and Japan would like to wage war against one of its former allies, it would necessarily collapse. It would not be able to inspire its Army to go to war because people are sick of waging war. And the Soviet government couldn't do it. Such is the soldiers' mood in those countries, which are Great Allied Powers«.

There is one more early evaluation by Stalin of the possibility of war, which looks like a directive to the communist parties. According to Dimitrov's Diary on the 4<sup>th</sup> of September, 1946, the Bulgarian leader had a talk with A. A. Zhdanov on international relations in the Central Committee of the CPSU. And the Soviet ideologue and number one person in the Kremlin hierarchy of the period informed him: »Cde. Stalin believes, that a new war in the nearest future is excluded. He is absolutely tranquil about the development of events. If we analyze the present situation and judge its results not in accordance with the **form they take but with their essence** [put in bold letters by the author. N. E.] it is possible to say that our point of view is the following: everything is all right«. Having set forth Stalin's position, Zhdanov continued: »The noise made by Anglo-Americans and the threat of a new war are only the blackmail and nothing more. They wish to discredit the Soviet Union in the eyes of their

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<sup>13</sup> Pravda, 13. March 1954.

<sup>14</sup> RGASPI, Collection of documents.

<sup>15</sup> At the special meeting in the Kremlin on the 27<sup>th</sup> of September, 1945, devoted to the ten-year program of Naval development Stalin said that for the next 10-12-15 years actions of the Soviet Navy should be defensive and in this connection he was in favor of submarines and heavy cruisers instead of aircraft-carriers and battleships as the main battle force. Simonov, N. S.: Military-Industrial Complex of the USSR in 1920s-1950s. Moscow 1996, pp. 207-208.

workers. But this is an evidence that our influence in their own countries is powerful enough.<sup>16</sup> As for British and U.S. policies, Zhdanov also mentioned that the contradictions between these countries had yet to reveal themselves.

It should be noted that, despite Stalin's realistic (if we put ideological wrappers aside) forecast, in Dimitrov's interpretation, Soviet leaders never lost sight of the possibility of a future war between the capitalist and the socialist systems and strove to use the peaceful respite for a twofold task: to restore and reinforce the USSR's industrial potential, left damaged from the Second World War (the total economic losses were approximately \$893 billions), and to strengthen Soviet military power, including acceleration of the work on the atom bomb, development (since the establishment of the Committee on rocket technology in May 1946) of rocketry and other types of modern armaments. The necessity for a period of peace without war determined Stalin's aspirations to continue the policy of co-operation with former allies or at any rate to keep the door opened. How he understood this co-operation – this is another question.

In his conversation with the representative of the American Republican party H. Stassen on the 9<sup>th</sup> of April, 1947, Stalin paid great attention to Stassen's question concerning a possibility of peaceful coexistence between two different economic systems. With reference to Lenin, Stalin said that co-operation between the USSR and the Western countries was possible as well as desirable. But he particularly emphasized the necessity of «a desire» to co-operate. «If one side doesn't wish to co-operate, it will result in a conflict, in a war», underlined the Soviet leader.<sup>17</sup> It is worth noting that in this conversation Stalin tried to separate ideology from policy, saying that mutual criticisms of two systems is propaganda, and «he, I. V. Stalin, is not a propagandist, but a businessman»<sup>18</sup>.

The Record of Stalin's conversation with Stassen was published in «Pravda» on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May and also printed as a separate pamphlet. It is possible to interpret this fact as Stalin's peculiar signal to the West that the USSR was ready to continue co-operation with its former allies. The political realism inherent to Stalin as a statesman left a certain space for searching for diplomatic compromises on disputed questions until the actions by both sides (the adoption of the «Marshal Plan», the establishment of the Cominform, consolidation of the Western and Soviet military-political blocs) lead finally to the replacement of the «co-operation-competition» model of the relationship between two systems by the «conflict» model.

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<sup>16</sup> Georgi Dimitrov Diary, p. 535.

<sup>17</sup> The record of Cde. I. V. Stalin's conversation with the representative of the USA Republican Party H. Stassen, 9. April 1947. RGASPI, f. 558, op.11, d. 384, l. 4.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. l. 6.

In the atmosphere of mounting international tension since the end of 1940s, Stalin and the Soviet leadership increased their attention to the modernization of the Soviet Army's weaponry. But, simultaneously, taking into consideration that the USSR was lagging behind the USA in armaments and particularly in nuclear weapons, as well as the great expense of the program of rearmament, to say nothing about ideological doctrines and propaganda aims, the Soviet Union began (since 1946) to submit various proposals of general armament reduction (conventional and atomic) under international control to the United Nations.<sup>19</sup>

It is possible to judge, how much attention Stalin was paying to the question of conventional armament reduction by his heavy editing of MFA's draft of the »Declaration on the Prevention of a New War and Strengthening of Peace and Security among Peoples«, to be presented by the Soviet delegation at the 5<sup>th</sup> session of the General Assembly opening in New York on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 1950. After the words that the General Assembly expressed its wish that the United States, Great Britain, France, China and the Soviet Union conclude a pact on the strengthening of peace, Stalin added (by pencil): »That these Great Powers would reduce their armed forces (ground troops, military aviation of all arms of the service, Navy) during 1950 by one third of their number in order to submit a question of further reduction of armed forces for discussion at one of the nearest sessions of the General Assembly.«<sup>20</sup>

As for the anxiety of the Soviet leaders for the state of national defense as well as the state of the armed forces of the countries of the »people's democracy«, it was aggravated at the beginning of January 1951 with the formation of the Atlantic Army (45-50 divisions strong at first). The Soviet leadership was also alarmed by the prospect of the establishment of the European Defense Community with the participation of West German divisions. By the time of the outbreak of the Korean war and the transformation of NATO into a genuine military bloc eastern European armies were not developed adequately and the Soviet Union could not catch up with the United States in the numbers of atomic bombs and in some types of weaponry (air force, anti-aircraft defense). It is known now (though not from Russian archival documents) that Stalin claimed at his meeting in the Kremlin with general secretaries of the communist parties and ministers of defense of the countries of the »people's democracy« on the 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> of January, 1951, that at the end of 1953 NATO would complete its reorganization and by this date eastern European countries should have their own armies formed and equipped.

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<sup>19</sup> Timerbaev, R. M.: *Russia and Nuclear Nonproliferation, 1945–1968*. Moscow 1999, pp. 56, 57.

<sup>20</sup> The draft of the »Declaration on the Prevention of a new war and strengthening of peace and security among peoples«. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 211, ll. 45-45 (back side).

Preparing for a large war with the United States and their allies, Stalin, however, preferred it to begin as late as possible. In an interview to a correspondent of *»Pravda«*, inspired by the Kremlin and published on the 17<sup>th</sup> of February, 1951, Stalin gave a rather vague answer to the question whether or not he considered a new world war unavoidable, he said: *»No. At least at present one cannot consider it unavoidable«*.<sup>21</sup> Stalin connected the possibility of unleashing a war with the strength of resistance by the world's peaceful forces to aggressive warriors. Within this context he paid great attention to the further development of the *»peace campaign«* waged by the Soviet Union. Simultaneously the Kremlin master continued to stake on force. After the first Soviet test of the atom bomb in 1949, which marked an end to American atomic monopoly, in autumn 1951 the USSR carried out a new test of the atomic bomb. This event, spotted by American special equipment, proved a great reaction in the West and gave Stalin the opportunity not only to confirm officially the fact of testing but to set forth the Soviet position towards atomic weapons, deriving political dividends from this. For his claim Stalin chose his favorite style of interview to *»Pravda«*. It is noteworthy that the Kremlin master wrote the whole text of the interview personally. In his archive there is a hand-written copy of this document with few author's corrections, except the paragraph about the control on the atomic weapons.<sup>22</sup> In his interview Stalin announced that Soviet *»testing of the atomic bombs of various caliber will be continued according to the defense plan of our country against the attack of the Anglo-American aggressive bloc«*.<sup>23</sup> But the Soviet leader also emphasized that the Soviet Union *»has no intentions to attack the United States or any other country at any time«*. Relying on his beliefs about force as an important element of policy, Stalin highly estimated the significance of the liquidation of the US atomic monopoly. In his opinion the fact that the Soviet Union had acquired atomic bombs would make the advocates of using nuclear weapons resort to negotiations on the prohibition of this kind of armaments.

The Soviet leader was very interested in the reaction of Western public opinion to his statement. We can judge about this by the marks made by him on the margins of the report from the Council of Ministers Committee on the protection of state secrets in the press about the telegrams sent by foreign correspondents from Moscow. Stalin was very satisfied that his bluff about the availability of different types of atomic weapons in the Soviet arsenal had produced a desirable impression. Besides, he paid great attention to the in-

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<sup>21</sup> Pravda, 17. February 1951.

<sup>22</sup> RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1130, l. 31–35.

<sup>23</sup> Pravda, 6. October 1951.

formation that the statement by the Soviet leader could create conditions for new negotiations on the control over atomic weapons.<sup>24</sup>

The degree of Stalin's interest in the adoption of the UN resolution about the prohibition of atomic weapons is revealed from his correspondence with G. Malenkov concerning the Politburo directives to A. Vyshinskii on the discussion of this question at the 6<sup>th</sup> General Assembly (December 1951). In his letter from the South to Malenkov of the 17<sup>th</sup> of December Stalin reproached this Politburo member that in the directive to Vyshinskii, adopted by the Central Committee (on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December), there had not been a single word about the Egyptian draft resolution concerning the »unconditional prohibition of atomic weapons and other types of mass destruction weapons«. »I think,« continued Stalin, »that this is the most expedient proposal in the present situation in the UN. If at this session of the UN we could pass only one proposal about unconditional prohibition of atomic weapons and other types of mass destruction weapons, this will be our major victory at this session of the UN. We can make concessions in all other questions – namely cutting armaments etc., it is not important. The most important now is to succeed with the resolution on absolute prohibition of atomic weapons«. Therefore, Stalin recommended to stimulate the Egyptians by saying that if their resolution would be adopted and sent to the Commission, the Soviet Union will make a compromise on all other issues. He asked Malenkov to impress upon Vyshinskii »how important this idea is«. Further Stalin explained that the difference between the Egyptian resolution and the Soviet approach was that »we demand not only the prohibition of tests of atomic weapons, but their production too«. <sup>25</sup> But he considered that Vyshinskii would be able to prove in the Commission that prohibition of tests meant the prohibition of the production of weapons as well.

Stalin was so much obsessed with his idea that the same day he sent another letter to Malenkov concerning the directive to Vyshinskii. Now he was not sure that the United Nation would adopt the Egyptian resolution but, if so, he wished that from the very beginning the resolution of Egypt would include the Soviet formula: »unconditional prohibition of the production and testing of atomic weapons«. <sup>26</sup>

It is rather difficult to find out Stalin's real motives behind this initiative adopted by the Politburo that very day. But taking into account Stalin's concern over considerable inferiority of the USSR in number of atomic weapons and strategic air force in comparison with the USA (it was well known to the

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<sup>24</sup> Report № 279a on the telegrams sent by foreign correspondents, 6. October 1951. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 1130, ll. 58, 61, 63.

<sup>25</sup> I. V. Stalin to G. M. Malenkov, 17. 12. 1951. RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 762, l. 43.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 55.

Kremlin from intelligence sources; as well as it might have known about the existence of operation plans for preventive atomic war against the Soviet Union in the USA, let alone General D. MacArthur's threat to use the atomic bomb in the Korean war) it is possible to suppose that it was in Soviet interest to put any kind of obstacle to increase the production of nuclear weapons.

As for Stalin's official claim about the possibility of a third world war in the last years of his life, he continued to assert that the war between the USA and the USSR was not closer than it had been two or three years ago.<sup>27</sup> However, in the conversation with Chou Enlai, during the Chinese Communist leader's visit to Moscow in the Summer of 1952, Stalin was more outspoken. Both statesmen agreed that the Korean war had proved that the United States could not wage a large war because they were not able to defeat a small nation like Korea. As Stalin noted then: »all their force is in the air raids, in the atom bomb«. <sup>28</sup> And it seems that this particular factor made Stalin worried about war with the United States. In 1950 the Politburo adopted the directive-70 about the construction of a defense line in the Arctic.<sup>29</sup> Since the beginning of the 1950s, military communications were erected in Chukotka and Kamchatka. These facts (as well as the acceleration of the Soviet scientists' work on the hydrogen bomb and the first hopeful results achieved in 1952) lead some scholars to suppose that at the end of his life Stalin was prepared to start a war against the USA.

One cannot deny the fact that the tone of Stalin's statements on the policy of Western powers at the end of his life became more aggressive and his desire to emphasize Soviet strength and contempt for adversaries' »threats« looked like an obsession. Here are just two examples. On the 29<sup>th</sup> of August, 1952, the Party newspaper »Pravda« published the article on the General Eisenhower's speech at the National Congress of the American Legion (25<sup>th</sup> of August). This editorial was inspired by Stalin's personal directive and at first edited by Molotov, who wrote that the American general »had imitated either Hitler or Goebbels in his attacks on the Soviet Union«. <sup>30</sup> For Stalin this characteristic of the Republican candidate to the U.S. Presidency seemed too laconic and he added a whole paragraph concerning Eisenhower's utterances. »As for Eisenhower's threats against the Soviet Union,« wrote the major Editor-in-Chief, »the Soviet people can only laugh at them, as they once laughed at Hitler's threats. It is said that the policy of threats is a weapon of those who are weak against those who are apprehensive. Well, what can we do

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<sup>27</sup> Pravda, 2. April 1952.

<sup>28</sup> Danilov, A.A., A.V. Pyzhikov: Birth of the Superpower. USSR in the First Postwar Years, Moscow 2001, p. 77.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>30</sup> RGASPI, Collection of documents.

with this, let General Eisenhower frighten crows on a kitchen-garden, if he likes the policy of intimidation so much.»<sup>31</sup>

The corrections that Stalin made to the draft of a speech by Marshal S. Timoshenko at the Red Square parade of the 7<sup>th</sup> of November, 1952, reveal, on one hand, his anxiety about the possibility of war and, on the other, his intention to use the opportunity of the Soviet Army parade to warn potential enemies that the Soviet Union was now stronger than never before. Instead of the phrase at the end of the speech that the Soviet Union can withstand all tests Stalin wrote »can reply to the blow of aggressors with a crushing blow«.<sup>32</sup>

Nevertheless we can regard this tough language of the Soviet leader as defensive rhetoric rather than evidence of his offensive intentions. Stalin, who considered state power to be the basis of successful international policy and therefore was so preoccupied with the task of masking any signs of USSR economic or military weakness, to a certain extent himself contributed to Western anxiety about the »Soviet threat«.

The extent of *realpolitik* which existed in Stalin's mentality made him too cautious as a politician to unleash a suicidal war with the United States. So far such a conclusion is based on second hand evidence and the logic of the development of events in the Soviet bloc. As far as more proofs are concerned, there is no other way than to wait until the process of declassification of new Russian archival documents continues.

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<sup>31</sup> RGASPI, f. 558, op. 11, d. 205, l. 164.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, l. 170.