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Research Article

WINSTON CHURCHILL AND EAST-WEST DETANTE

The efforts to end the Cold War, 1950-1953

Political Science

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Abstract

Nikita Khrushchev said: "In fact, it was Winston Churchill's idea to open a line of communication between the Western powers and the Soviet Union after Stalin's death..." There is no doubt that Churchill should be remembered as the father of détente, as he deserves to be called the *Warrior of the Cold War*. As with many aspects of his life, Churchill's attitude towards the Soviet Union and Communism has generated much debate. The same statesman who incited war against the Bolshevik regime in 1919, calling it 'Bodies of unscrupulous monkeys', or a 'culture of infectious diseases', also incited collaboration with Stalin in the 1930s. He spent the last years of his life in office calling for a meeting and summit to de-escalate Cold War tensions. Churchill's idea of a summit was opposed by most Western governments. But despite strong objections from the State Department, the British Foreign Office, and many foreign ministers of Western governments, he tried to reach a *modus vivendi* with Moscow until the end of his career. His obsession with going down in history as 'the greatest peacemaker' remains admirable to this day, but his idea of a summit tended to divide the Western Allies and moreover Prime Minister Churchill lacked a policy clear to achieve his goal. Furthermore, the events of 1951-55 made a détente with Moscow impossible. Considering the events of these years, it is difficult to accept that Winston Churchill's ideas for a summit with the Soviet Union would have improved East-West relations. However, the enthusiasm of this great statesman is to be admired, along with his desire to ease Cold War tensions, despite the opposition he faced and his poor health. In this study we will present Churchill's obsession with détente, the views of the American government and the perspective of the British Cabinet, as well as the implications that Churchill's ideas had on détente and his much-sought summit between the Western powers and the Soviet Union.

CHURCHILL AND THE SOVIET UNION BEFORE 1950

One of Churchill's first initiatives to call for negotiations with Moscow came during his 'Iron Curtain' speech in Fulton, Missouri, USA, in March 1946:

> *I do not believe that Soviet Russia wants war. What it wants are the fruits of war and the limitless extension of its power and doctrine.... It begs for an agreement, and the longer this agreement is delayed, the more difficult it will be and the greater will be our dangers.*[1]

This speech by Winston Churchill called for negotiations with the Soviet Union and the establishment of a lasting agreement that would ease the East-West tension in the early years of the Cold War, but it also attracted a great deal of attention and proved highly persuasive to public opinion of the American public on the hostile intentions of the Soviet Union under Stalin:

[1]Winston Churchill. Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri. March 5, 1946.

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended over the continent.[2]

This speech was perceived as very anti-communist and established Churchill's image as the Cold War Warrior *par excellence* in East and West. In fact, the 'Iron Curtain' speech was Churchill's first major post-war attempt to convene a negotiating summit with Moscow.[3]

Churchill's 1946 statements are often presented as self-contradictory. While on the one hand he drew attention to the Soviet threat, appealing for military force and opposing policies that were more advisory than necessary towards Moscow, on the other hand he recommended that a peace settlement be sought with Stalin. For Churchill this was a logical course of action in order to prevent the escalation of a conflict or a third world war. Regarding the development of the American atomic bomb, Churchill had declared in parliament since August 1945 that "it will take at least three or four years for the Soviets to surpass the progress achieved in America."

In this period of time, the relationship between the nations had to be renewed and the creation of an international control organization was needed: "We must not lose an hour or a day." Churchill was convinced that since the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki the relationship between the Western world and Moscow had changed radically, in favor of the West, albeit for a short time.[4] This situation had to be exploited - but it had to be achieved through negotiations and not the application of a pre-emptive war, as was often recommended by the United States.

Churchill's confidence in negotiations with Moscow was not the same as Washington's. After the American presidential election in late 1948, which reinstated President Harry S. Truman, the Democratic administration was becoming more convinced than ever that the military power of the Western powers was far inferior to that of the Soviet Union. In January 1949, Deputy Secretary of State Dean Acheson was elected Secretary of State and in early 1950 began using the phrase 'negotiation by force.' Acheson believed that given Soviet superiority in military numbers and conventional weaponry, the West needed to build up a larger weapons arsenal before 'negotiations by force' could be applied. Churchill shared the same opinion according to the logic of the 'balance of powers', the weak must join together in order to resist the strong, and alliances and armed forces are a better guarantee of survival than laws or international organizations. However, Churchill also believed in close cooperation between the 'English-speaking' powers, in European unity, and in an Anglo-American 'special relationship'.[5]

[2]Ibid.
[3]Klaus Larres. Churchill's Cold War. Yale University Press, Great Britain, 2002, p 124.
[4]Klaus Larres. Churchill's Cold War, p. 127.
[5]John W. Young. Churchill and East-West détente. Transactions of the Royal Historical Society. Sixth series. XI. Cambridge University Press. 2001, p. 374..

A believed that the Soviets were a threat 'but there was nothing they admired more than strength'[6], so an Anglo-American alliance was necessary to contain them. As long as the west had superior strength "Then the communists would sit down to bargain."

Acheson's position was supported by the British Army Chiefs and the Labor government. They considered discussions with Moscow premature. Churchill insisted on his belief that high-level discussions with Moscow would ease East-West tensions. On 14 February he gave a speech in Edinburgh, and for the first time included foreign policy in his election campaign, until then completely dominated by domestic politics. He called for discussions with Moscow, reiterating his views and positions of 1945-46, and for the first time he used the phrase 'a summit conference' as the proper method for negotiations.

> *The idea of talks with Soviet Russia at the highest levels does not leave my mind. This idea appeals to me as a supreme attempt to bridge the gulf that exists between the two worlds, so that each of us can live life, if not amicably, at least without the hatred of the Cold War.*[7]

Real progress in East-West relations did not seem possible simply through the vague ways of a 'diplomatic process' as he had put it in January 1948. He was already convinced that success could only be achieved through a meeting with heads of government. He had in mind a summit like that of the 'Big Three' during the Second World War. According to Klaus Larres, public support for Churchill's idea of diplomacy through the highest level summit was the way to prevent a global conflict. According to him, Churchill used his Edinburgh speech to play his patriotic card to secure Great Britain's right to a seat at the 'Big Three' table.[8]

Churchill's speech in Edinburgh had set out his political intentions if the British electorate would once again open the door to Number 10, Downing Street. In the election of 20 February 1950, Labor was returned with a majority of five more seats. This narrow victory made a snap election possible in the near future so Churchill could stay on as leader of the opposition. For most of 1950-51, neither the government nor the opposition attempted to take major initiatives in domestic or foreign policy. The only exception was Churchill, who continued to insist on his plans for the summit.

Interestingly, although Churchill had been calling for a 'deal' with Moscow since early 1946 and had been promoting a 'Big Three' summit since February 1950, he never explained how these negotiations would lead to the relaxation of tension and perhaps the end of the Cold War.

[6]Winston Churchill. Westminster College, Fulton, Missouri. March 5, 1946.
[7]Winston Churchill. Edinburgh, Scotland, February 14, 1950. Source Churchill Letters 5/32.
[8]Klaus Larres. Churchill's Cold War, p. 133.

He remained silent regarding the topics that would be discussed at the summit and in what sequence they would be discussed!

However, Winston Churchill's contribution to international relations during this period was that, from the first months of the Cold War, he had begun to warn of a possible catastrophe and a nuclear holocaust. He had introduced the question of détente relations between east and west as a subject for discussion since 1946, but he failed to present a methodology which could make his general theory more tangible in the political world. This lack of detail contributed decisively to the distrust that existed towards him in political circles in Britain and the United States. Therefore, it was he himself who underestimated his vision.[9]

While maintaining peace around the globe, Churchill's constant theme was strengthening Britain's position in the world. He was not only interested in easing the East-West conflict because he was fully convinced of the fundamental British role in initiating such a policy, even, if possible, to achieve it under his leadership. Churchill believed strongly in his missionary role for Great Britain and its Empire. For Churchill, the agreement with the Soviet Union and a closer relationship between European countries, including European rearmament, served only his primary goal; which was the prosperity, power and reputation of Great Britain. He planned to achieve this by pursuing a closer and more effective 'fraternal relationship' with the United States.

Churchill was fully aware of Britain's dire economic situation. He believed that while strengthening and expanding the Soviet and American military, Britain should follow behind. As a result, the world economic position of his country would decrease more and Britain would begin to depend economically and militarily on the United States. Only a period of détente, which would give Britain a space to recover economically, together with an escalating concentration of control over imperial resources, could prevent, or even reverse, this process.

THE FIRST MONTHS IN OFFICE, 1950-1951

Despite Winston Churchill's hopes for peace proposed during the election campaign, and despite hopes from the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden, that a relaxation of East-West tension might actually be achieved, the first year of the Conservative government saw no easing of the Cold War. On the surface it appeared that the Tory leader's talk of détente was nothing more than an 'electoral maneuver'. But, in fact, there were a number of reasons why Churchill could not improve relations with Moscow during his first months as prime minister.

One of the reasons was the opposition of the United States. Cooperation with the Americans was undoubtedly essential to Churchill, and he appeared to be planning to raise the issue of détente with President Truman during their meeting in Washington in early 1952.

[9]Ibid. p. 137.

The Prime Minister's ideas about a new relationship with the Soviet Union had forced the Americans to think hard about the matter before his arrival, and the evening in Williamsburg highlighted the different opinions that Eden, Acheson, and himself had about East-West negotiations. The summit with the Soviets, to everyone's surprise, was almost never mentioned during the talks in Washington, and the word détente did not figure in Churchill's public statements. He had pinned his hopes on establishing a strong personal relationship with President Truman, which could later lead to détente based on Anglo-American unity. However, that relationship failed to flourish and détente became one more obstacle to the strong Anglo-American alliance.[10]

By the time of Churchill's visit to Washington, Cold War fears were at their highest, as McCarthyism was expanding rapidly. The Truman administration had been accused in the past of being 'soft' on communism. Therefore, during this time, any possibility of negotiations with the Soviets was negligible because the United States was involved in the election campaign during which Truman, although he was not a candidate for re-election, had no opportunity to take dramatic initiatives in foreign policies.

American analysts did not anticipate fruitful talks with the Soviets at the moment, so they ruled out the possibility of a summit. According to them, at least an agreement had been reached on the Korean War, which had been simmering for a year. Also, they were worried about the fact that a relaxation of tensions would soften the efforts to increase the armament of the Western forces, and especially the rearmament process of West Germany.

The United States had proposed the rearmament of West Germany in the late 1950s as a result had caused turmoil in the Atlantic alliance. In time, France and other European countries agreed to proceed only on the condition that German troops would provide security by being placed under a supranational European army. Negotiations for a European Defense Community (European Defense Community) started in 1951, but any sign of the end of the Cold War could make France in particular abandon this whole initiative. Given the American initiative, it is not surprising that Churchill's visit to Washington in January 1952 showed no progress towards instigating talks with Stalin.

Churchill believed that the danger of war was diminishing and that the West should try to try to reach, more or less, a permanent agreement with the Soviet Union and end the Cold War. But Washington had a very different strategy in mind. The Truman administration believed that the best course of action was to continue building the power of the Western world so that they would be in a position to continue the Cold War on other terms to the advantage of the West.

[10]John W. Young. Winston Churchill's lasat campaign. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1996, p. 87.

Both Truman and Acheson continued to see the idea of a three- or four-power summit as a waste of time and fruitless.

Another reason for Americans and other Western countries not to accept Churchill's idea of détente with Moscow was the Palasis Rose meeting in Paris. In mid-1951, shortly before Churchill became prime minister, the Western powers had met with the Soviets at the Palais Rose in Paris, where they had seen the meeting as a waste of time and going nowhere. Officials from the United States, Britain, France and the Soviet Union, tasked with preparing a subsequent meeting for foreign ministers, could not even reach an agreement on the meeting's agenda.

After the experience of Paris, no one wanted to organize a four-power conference until there was a certainty that success would be achieved. In the months following the meeting in Washington, the Soviets themselves showed no willingness to negotiate on terms acceptable to the West. On the contrary, Moscow seemed determined to disrupt cooperation with the West, and in particular to prevent the formation of a European Defense Committee, through which West Germany would be rearmed.

The Russians were totally opposed to rearmament of Germany and forced the west from February 1952 to start negotiations for a treaty on Germany, which would bring about a united 'neutral' Germany, with no ties and alliances to either bloc. The Western powers regarded this proposal simply as an attempt to prevent German rearmament and were not at all impressed with the basis of Moscow's proposals.[11] On March 10, 1952, the so-called 'Stalin Letter' invited the United States, Britain and France to 'urgently discuss... a peace treaty with Germany'. Stalin apparently offered to unify Germany and, after months of Soviet opposition, allow her to have an armed force, but on the condition that she remain neutral during the East-West disputes.

There is no doubt that Stalin's letter was influenced by the advance of the Western powers towards the establishment of the European Defense Community. The Kremlin was more desperate than ever to prevent the rearmament of Germany as part of the Western bloc. The letter had great potential to divide the Western powers at a crucial time.

During this period, Churchill was seventy-seven years old. He was getting old and was no longer able to maintain his mental clarity and physical energies for a long time. He had a stroke in 1949, so his poor health indicated that he would not be in office for a long time, but the arteriosclerosis that made him suffer made him even more determined to achieve his goals. If he had been an obsessive anti-communist at heart or if his proposal for a summit with the Soviets had been an electoral lie, it would have been clearer given his health situation.

[11]John W. Young. The foreign policy of Churchill's peacetime administration, 1951-55, Leicester University Press, 1988, ff. 57-58.

But, in fact, before he retired, instead of retiring he focused his energies on easing tension with the Soviets, reducing their rule through policies of moderation rather than threats.

CHURCHILL AND EISENHOWER

When Dwight D. Eisenhower's victory as the new President of the United States was announced on November 5, 1952, Churchill could not hide his joy and immediately launched a heartfelt message to his fellow warlord, hoping for 'a renewed of our friendship… for the same purposes of peace and freedom as in the past.' On December 13, Churchill proposed to President Eisenhower a visit to America.

Before Churchill sailed for New York, suddenly, the idea of a summit was revived, this time by Stalin himself. In an interview with American journalist James Reston, published on Christmas Day, the Soviet dictator stated that the United States and the Soviet Union 'can continue to live in peace' and that he was willing to help stop the Korean War and that he would he "considered as a favour" the idea of a meeting with Eisenhower to ease world political tension. Without a doubt, the flavor of Stalin's statement was the most positive of all his statements made by the Soviets since April, and the tone of this interview contrasted favorably with the harsh propaganda with the 19th Congress of the Communist Party, held a few months ago. Also, it contributed to the belief that Eisenhower's election as President could lead to new beginnings in international relations.[12]

The Russia Committee of the British Foreign Office judged that Stalin's interist contained nothing new. From Moscow, Ambassador Gascoigne interpreted Stalin's statements simply as an attempt to confuse and divide the West. Such an interpretation was consistent with the logic of Stalin's "*Economic Problems of Socialism"* and his suggestions that Soviet strategy should focus on the disruption of the capitalist world. It also made sense given the fact that the European Defense Community, signed in May, had yet to be ratified.

Churchill sailed for America on the *Queen Mary* from Southampton on December 31, 1952. In some ways, his conversations with the newly elected president seemed ominous. Eisenhower considered Churchill to be 'a remarkable character' and a great statesman. He also regarded Great Britain as America's 'best friend' and the impression he made on Churchill was 'as classy and interesting as ever'. However, the President-elect was not prepared to be led by London or to give the international public the impression of a coalition of two powers between Britain and the United States.[13]

[12]John W. Young. Winston Churchill's last campaign, p 115.
[13]Klaus Larres. Churchill's cold war, p 184.

In fact, Eisenhower believed that Churchill was already too old to be prime minister. He seemed to be living in the past trying to relive the days of World War II.

During the talks, the President-elect expressed his willingness to consider accepting Stalin's offer for face-to-face talks in a meeting held in a neutral capital, such as Stockholm. Moreover, Eisenhower stated that he was willing to allow Prime Minister Churchill to meet Stalin 'whenever he wished'.

Churchill was not at all happy with President Eisenhower's idea of meeting Stalin face-to-face, nor with the argument that a British representative was not needed at a Superpower conference. According to Churchill, it was discriminatory that neither Eisenhower nor Stalin saw the need for Britain's participation in the talks.

Churchill was disappointed by his visit to the United States. With two unsuccessful trips to America, he had been unable to establish a strong Anglo-Saxon alliance to lead the Western alliance or steer the West towards a new strategy towards the Soviet Union. In early 1953, the idea of the summit became part of the public debate, but despite the fact that there was a new administration in Washington; the possibility of the summit was off the agenda. The influence of McCarthyism and the strong anti-communist sentiments of American public opinion made it inadvisable for any president to attend a meeting with the Soviets before the Korean War was over. Moreover, the new Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, was an avowed anti-communist who easily manipulated a President ecstatic about his election victory. Regarding relations with the Soviets, Dulles played down any pressure he had from within his administration for détente with the Soviet Union.

For Churchill, the situation was transformed by the announcement of Stalin's death on 5 March 1953: this event convinced him that, finally, a long-term 'deal' with the Soviet Union could be reached.

THE DEATH OF STALIN AND COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP

On March 6, 1953, the Communist leadership in Moscow declared that: "Joseph Stalin's heart... no longer beats." To everyone's surprise, Stalin was replaced not by a single man, but by a 'collective leadership' under Georgi Malenkov, with many deputy leaders, the most important of whom seemed to be the chief of police Lavrenti Beria, and the new foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov. The announcement of Stalin's death included the statement that "The foreign policy of the Soviet Union is a policy of protecting and strengthening peace", and at the funeral on March 9, speeches by Malenkov, Beria, and Molotov emphasized the same.

There was nothing unusual about peaceful Soviet protests, but in those cases there was no ordinary punishment of Western activities. The most significant statement came on March 15 from Malenkov, as he introduced the new Council of Ministers, declaring that the Soviet Union would defend itself and remain a 'people's democracy', but also added that 'Now there is nothing that cannot be be settled by peaceful means... This applies to all states, including the United States.'

The reason why Soviet leaders were willing to ease the tension remains debatable. John W. Young believes that 'There is no reason to believe that Malenkov and Beria really wanted to see a softening of the Cold War, and were willing to compromise, even on a few points, with Western leaders.'[14]

Malenkov wanted to defuse the tension outside the borders. Despite the fact that he was not a foreign policy expert, he gave some signs, as head of the Council of Ministers, that he understood that nuclear war would destroy the Soviet Union. But despite some moves to defuse the tension, the 'collective leadership' aimed to retain the Eastern bloc entirely and increase Soviet military power.

During this time, the policies of 'collective leadership' were causing confusion in Western capitals but there was also a great lack of information within the Kremlin itself. At first the British Foreign Office was reluctant to accept any change in Soviet policy. British Foreign Office officials wanted to see action and not just hear words. However, Prime Minister Churchill's thoughts were leaning towards the possibility of better relations with Moscow. As testified by Lord Moran on 7 March, 'Very quickly, the Prime Minister felt that the death of Stalin could defuse the Cold War, and that this possibility could not be repeated.'[15] On March 10, he wrote to President Eisenhower that it would be good to approach the Soviets, with the goal of organizing a summit. The prime minister stressed that he had 'done many collaborations with Molotov' in the past, adding that 'we will give an account before history if no initiative is taken to end the ongoing incidents between the two divisions of the world.'

The next day, Eisenhower replied that, although he wanted to give hope to the world, he did not want to seek a summit with the Soviets. Faced with this lack of American enthusiasm, Churchill, when questioned in the parliament chamber on 12 March, announced that he would refuse to withdraw from the 'policy of the meeting of the three powers'.

Churchill's message to Eisenhower came at a key moment in the US administration's own intense debate over Stalin's death. The United States had no backup plan to apply in this case. The National Security Council met on March 11 to discuss Stalin's death.

[14]John W. Young. Winston Churchill's last campaign, p. 133.
[15]Lord Moran. Winston Churchill. The struggle for survival 1940/65. Constable, London, 1966, p. 403.

A presidential speech was proposed, which contained the proposal of a meeting of the foreign ministers of the four great powers. This was a serious proposal and should not be considered propaganda, but the real intention was to use Stalin's death as much as possible for psychological pressure.

Secretary of State Dulles was willing to accept a presidential address but it had to be a call for peace in Korea and Indochina as a condition for further discussions. The Secretary of State's strategy was to avoid the four-power talks and increase pressure for the ratification of the European Defense Community. He successfully insisted that Eisenhower's speech should contain some 'proof' of Soviet intentions, not only peace in Korea but also on the Austrian Treaty, and he added that the most powerful US allies in Europe should be consulted on the speech, so to preserve western unity.

The speech was far from a quick initiative for talks between East and West. There were still concerns from the State Department that a positive speech by President Eisenhower would stimulate unrealistic speculation about the end of the Cold War.

The State Department's greatest concern concerned the fate of the European Defense Community, which, in the following months, it became clear that the French parliament would not ratify until the possibility of an agreement on the War of Cold. For now, however, the State Department preferred to play down speculation about détente. Eisenhower was often irritated by the State Department's negativity, but, in the end, he set aside his willingness to explore détente with the Soviets, focusing instead on the idea of preserving the unity of the Western powers, and on the trust promoted by Dulles, that the Soviet concessions were proof of the success of Western power politics.

As Eisenhower's speech dragged from formulation to re-formulation, Churchill and his Foreign Secretary, Eden, considered an initiative of their own to ease East-West tensions. In London, the actions of the Soviets during March were analyzed in detail, and some suggested fundamental changes in Kremlin policy. In addition to the importance of internal softening of the state police, the collective leadership showed many signs of their desire for a friendlier international atmosphere. Requests to change the location of the American and British embassies, Molotov accepted Dag Hammarskjold as Secretary General of the United Nations, and most importantly, on March 28, the communists in Korea agreed to exchange wounded prisoners.

Another sign of Soviet goodwill, which affected Britain in particular, was the proposal for air security talks over East Germany. Churchill quickly decided to accept the proposals for Anglo-Soviet talks, which began on March 31 and quickly expanded to include representatives of the United States and France. Although these talks failed to succeed, they had a significant impact in the months following Stalin's death.

At the British Foreign Office, the Russia Committee circulated a special study on 7 April, arguing that changes in Soviet foreign policy were merely tactical and short-term, adding that changes in Russian domestic policies were designed to make the new regime the more popular. The Russia Committee believed it was safer to continue NATO's policy of military buildup in the hope that this would force the Soviets to make real changes in the future.

EISENHOWER'S "CHANCE FOR PEACE"

The most important question that arose in Western politics was President Eisenhower's speech entitled 'A Chance for Peace'. A copy of this speech was shown to Churchill on 9 April. In that copy, any sign of an offer to meet the Soviets was not included.

> *Now a new leadership has taken power in the Soviet Union.*
> *Therefore, the new Soviet leadership has a great opportunity, along with the rest of the world, to help change the course of history.*
> *Will she do it? We are interested in the sincerity of peaceful intentions proven by deeds...*[16]

It also said the West had no 'aggressive intent' in the Cold War and was willing to welcome 'genuine evidence of peaceful intentions on the part of the Soviet Union'. But he also blamed the Soviets for the Cold War, defended NATO and the European Defense Community, called for the unification and freedom of Germany, and expressed the desire for the independence of Eastern Europe. Certain 'works' were required of Moscow as proof of its good faith, including an amnesty in Korea, peace in Indochina, and an Austrian Treaty.

The international reaction to Eisenhower's speech on April 16, 1953 was very positive. But his speech was not accompanied by concrete actions on the part of the United States. In fact, in May, the US administration threatened to use atomic bombs to bring about quick negotiations in order to bring about a quick end to the Korean War.[17] Criticizing the speech before it was delivered; Churchill was willing to use it as a further step towards his more radical ideas for a Union-West conference. As in 1951, the Prime Minister clearly saw détente as a way of neutralizing his left-wing opponents and uniting Labor and the Conservatives in a bipartisan national foreign policy.

At the moment, not all opposition MPs were impressed: One complained that Churchill had been promoting the idea of a summit since 1950 but, after eighteen months in office, had done nothing. From 12 April, Churchill had taken charge of the Foreign Office in the role of Prime Minister and Acting Foreign Secretary, after Anthony Eden had been hospitalized for an unsuccessful operation.

[16]Dwight D. Eisenhower. Chance for peace. April 16, 1953. Washington DC
[17]Klaus Larres. Churchill's Cold War, p. 212.

If the Prime Minister wanted to propose a summit during this time, the evidence shows that he would have received very little official support from the Western powers. Eisenhower soon made it clear; despite his 'Chance for Peace' speech that US policy lay behind the strategy of building up Western military power. No other world leader except Churchill saw any real hope of a détente two months after Stalin's death. And apparently, they didn't even want to see this hope.

CHURCHILL'S SPEECH ON MAY 11

In May 1953, Pierson Dixon, Assistant Deputy Foreign Secretary, was having lunch with Churchill when the latter told him that, although he wanted an ideal meeting of the three powers, Britain-USA-Soviet Union, he was willing, as Eisenhower had informed him, to visit Moscow only.

But if he had decided to do this, he would have a lot of problems. If Churchill were to visit Moscow, it would be without the long-awaited blessing of the Americans. Equally worrying would be Molotov's continued lack of interest in the list of bilateral problems presented by the Foreign Ministry a month ago. The prime minister did not understand how suspicious he was viewed by Moscow. Of course the Kremlin was fully aware that Britain was economically and politically weakened and dependent on the United States. It was very clear that a 'Big Three' summit required Washington's approval and very little progress could be made from bilateral Anglo-Soviet talks to end the Cold War. [18]As much as he tried to ignore the problems, Churchill had promised Eisenhower that he would not visit Moscow during that time. So the Prime Minister decided to bring back the idea of a summit with the Soviets using his favorite weapon - a famous speech. On May 1, he had to open the debates of the Foreign Ministry in the parliament, so this occasion offered the most favorable opportunity for action.

This speech, as a foreign policy summary, was wide-ranging. It dealt with Korea and Egypt, Indochina, and the rearmament of Germany. However, the key points were towards the end of the speech when Churchill said he was 'encouraged by a series of friendly gestures' from the collective Soviet leadership and outlined a possible way to secure peace with the Soviet Union.

The May 11 speech contained two very significant proposals. Churchill proposed a new Locarno[19] to allay Soviet fears of German irredentism and allow for a relaxation of tensions in Central Europe. As in 1944, he was willing to admit that 'Russia had the right to ensure... that the terrible events of Hitler's invasion would not be repeated...' The real bombshell in Churchill's speech was not Locarno but his statement at the end of the speech, when he said that 'I believe that a top-level conference of the great powers should be convened soon. This conference should not

[18]Ibid. p. 218.

[19] Locarno Pact, 1925. Guaranteed the borders of Western Europe and was particularly important for stabilizing Franco-German relations in the 1920s.

be held up or delayed by the jungle of technical details from expert groups... The conference should focus on as few countries and as few representatives as possible...' [20]

> *I believe that a top-level conference of the great powers should be held without wasting time. This conference should not be limited by a rigid agenda, or lose its purpose in the jungle of technical details, as well as the objections of experts and officials. This conference should be held by as few states and individuals as possible*[21]

Finally, more than three years after his Edinburgh speech, eighteen months as head of government, and two months after Stalin's death, Churchill made a public call for a high-level meeting with the Soviets. His speech in the House of Commons included, as many times before, many inaccuracies, for example: who would attend that meeting? Where and when?

After May 11, 1953, the Western debate on détente and the complications it involved would never be the same. Churchill's speech was covered by the world's press, and a Gallup Poll showed that 77% of Britons preferred a summit with the Soviets. More interesting was the fact that, according to the same poll, public opinion in America supported the summit more than in Britain. The US embassy was forced to call Churchill's May 11 speech 'his greatest speech since the war'. Wisely, the State Department advised the US administration to avoid a formal response to Churchill's call for a summit with the Soviets and that any statement they made should include lines from President Eisenhower's 'Chance for Peace' speech.

Churchill's speech horrified the foreign ministers of Western countries and met with many objections. None of the British politicians and none of the Foreign Office officials shared the Prime Minister's enthusiasm for summit and conference diplomacy. The Russians received it very well, but it was done without consulting the Cabinet, without notifying the Foreign Ministry according to protocol, and without prior notice to Eisenhower. Anthony Eden and Lord Salisbury, the government's foreign affairs spokesman in the House of Lords, opposed the Prime Minister's idea, and Eisenhower again urged Churchill to be more cautious. The French government was also shocked by the speech of the British Prime Minister, on the one hand it was not happy with the speech as Churchill had thrown gasoline against the German rearmament issue in the French Assembly, and on the other hand Churchill seemed to want to exclude France from the proposed summit.

On May 20, French Prime Minister Rene Mayer became so concerned about these points that he appealed to President Eisenhower to arrange a summit between the three major Western powers, Great Britain, the United States, and France, to check on Churchill.

[20]John W. Young. Winston Churchill's last campaign, p. 160.
[21]Winston Churchill. House of Commons. May 11, 1953.

Despite the doubts of the State Department, President Eisenhower decided to accept Mayer's proposal: if Churchill could not be silenced by telegram, perhaps he would be silenced by a face-to-face meeting. The President called Churchill immediately about the proposal and the latter was very willing to accept the meeting of the three states, having faith in himself that his arguments, and not those of his opponents, would triumph on such an occasion. However, he insisted that the meeting should be held on British territory, in Bermuda.

The stage seemed best prepared for confrontations between the Westerners on the issue of détente.

CONFERENCE OF THE THREE GREAT POWERS IN BERMUDA

Almost immediately after the decision was made to meet the three powers, Bermuda's plans for the meeting ran into a series of problems. On 21 May, the same day that the British Cabinet gave its approval for the conference, Mayer's government fell as a result of a vote against finance in the National Assembly; and France was plunged into a political crisis of extraordinary duration. Churchill had no sympathy whatsoever for the events in Paris. He was willing to proceed with the arrangements made for Bermuda with an Anglo-American participation only without the French Prime Minister. He was very enthusiastic about Bermuda and created an agenda for the meeting with the idea of talks with the Soviets as the main topic and sent a message to Molotov expressing the hope that Bermuda would lead to friendly contacts between East and West.

Others continued to see the conference as a way to control the Prime Minister. The United States government was determined to establish policy in Europe, primarily with NATO and Germany's unification with the West, and stated publicly that Bermuda did not necessarily lead to talks with the Soviets, and described the conference as an opportunity to 'discuss among friends some of the obvious difficulties that the world is going through today'. They were encouraged to take this stance by West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer. The German chancellor had based his entire policy in Germany on cooperation with the West and was terrified of the possible results of Churchill's idea of talks with Russia, especially when the elections were held in Germany that year.

Adenauer had been pressing both the American and British governments since mid-April for the security of their policies in Germany, and his fears were of great importance in the British Foreign Office. On 30 May, the Foreign Office sent an important memorandum to Prime Minister Churchill, which highlighted the dangers of a united 'neutralised' Germany: it would mean the reversal of Western policy in Germany, the destruction of NATO's defense strategies, a weak Germany in the eyes of Russia, an invalidation of all hopes of a permanent peace between France and Germany, which would infuriate the West Germans themselves, and perhaps even induce the Americans to abandon Europe.

Encountering convincing arguments like these, the Prime Minister admitted that he had not thought deeply about all the problems of his policy, but tried to blame the problems in Europe on the French who failed to ratify the European Defense Community.[22]

On June 16, a protest took place in the German Democratic Republic. The protest spread from East Berlin to 300 other East German cities. Soviet troops quickly arrived and declared a state of emergency. The protests were accompanied by beatings and violence, and at least 25 demonstrators were killed and some executed, while the following days and weeks were marked by numerous arrests. Churchill was worried that his opponents of the summit idea would use the protests in Germany to make the issue even more difficult. And in fact it happened. For Eisenhower and Dulles, the protests in the German Democratic Republic were an opportunity to extinguish Churchill's idea forever. How could I negotiate with a government that had just killed and wounded unarmed demonstrators?

The protest in East Germany had implications for Moscow's foreign policy. The Kremlin was in no mood to apply the diplomacy of summits and conferences. It seemed too risky for them to enter into international negotiations with the West. The protests in East Germany were decisive in turning Stalin's successors away from the idea of a summit, no matter how much Churchill was determined to try.

On the evening of July 23, a week before Churchill set sail for Bermuda, the Prime Minister suffered a stroke. The Bermuda Conference kept getting postponed.

The Bermuda meeting was finally held from 4 to 7 December, and this was because of a declaration made by the Soviets on 3 November. The most important topic during the talks was, without a doubt, the Soviet Union, and it soon became clear that Churchill's ideas had no chance of being accepted. Churchill insisted that contacts with Russia should be opened and said 'let's make sure we don't take it so lightly and ignore this possibility (Stalin's death)', but Eisenhower brutally rejected the idea, comparing the 'new look' of the Soviets as 'a whore in a new dress'.[23]

Surprisingly, Churchill no longer sought a meeting between Western and Soviet leaders, but only for the opening of contacts, and he supported the principle of preserving Western unity as the fundamental element of policies towards the Soviet Union.[24] The illness, and the strength of his opponents, apparently took their toll on the British Prime Minister.

[22]John W. Young. Churchill, the Russians and the Western Alliance: the three-power conference at Bermuda, December 1953. English Historical Review, 1986.
[23]Henry Pelling. Churchill's Peacetime Ministry, 1951-55. MacMillan Press Ltd, London, 1997, p.110.
[24]John W. Young. Churchill, the Russians and the Western Alliance: the three-power conference at Bermuda, December 1953, p. 903.

In fact, the main debate on Russia took place at the time of the Berlin Conference. Churchill realized that he had failed to convince President Eisenhower on the Russia issue from Secretary of State Dulles: 'This man preaches like a Methodist pastor and damn it has the same text. That nothing but bad things will come out of the meeting with Malenkov... Although it will be difficult, I refuse to be defeated by this bastard. I am humiliated by my own old age.'[25]

But, ironically, what became the most important topic during the meeting, and which surprised the British and the French, was Eisenhower, who made a proposal for a different way of cooperation with Russia: an attempt to create an international control over atonic energy.

Eisenhower proposed the creation of an International Atomic Energy Authority to oversee the peaceful use of atomic energy for the benefit of more peoples than just nuclear states.

Churchill was well aware that a major speech by the President on atomic energy (later called 'Atoms for Peace') would distract the world's attention from the results achieved in Bermuda.

On the surface, Bermuda appeared to be the most powerful international meeting since Potsdam, but in fact it was a failure, and the real reason for its failure must be sought in the ideas of the man with whom this conference was identified, Winston Churchill. His ideas for a visit to Moscow or for holding a summit with Russia with an open agenda arose from past conferences such as Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam, but the wartime conferences which Churchill hoped to recreate had been held over a period cooperation between the union and the west and even then created more problems than solved them.

If a meeting with the Russian leader Malenkov had taken place in 1953, it is of course impossible to say how it would have turned out: but it is known that when the summit was finally held in 1955, nothing came of it. In retrospect, it is all the more clear that a long-term détente could only succeed if the United States and the Soviet Union learned, over a long period, that talks would bring more benefits than the Cold War and each had interests to follow dialogue policy.

Churchill's policy had several problems. Most striking was the British State Department and Foreign Office belief that Russia's policies had not changed since Stalin's death: men like Dulles regarded any sign of 'moderation' from Moscow as a sign of Western policy correctness - if they deserved to be called 'moderate'. It is likely, according to the arguments of many researchers, that the Soviets were seriously considering abandoning their zone in Germany if the conditions were right, so they did not only aim to hinder the European Defense Community and renew West Germany.

[25]John W. Young, p. 904.

However, Churchill's belief that dialogue and face-to-face meetings with the new Russian leadership would bring about a secure detente in East-West relations appeared to be exaggerated. The collective Soviet leadership was more interested in domestic tension for power than in easing Cold War tensions. The goals of the Soviet leadership and those of the British prime minister differed significantly.

For Henry Kissimger, this difference consisted of a difference of doctrine and political background. For him, the main reason for the misunderstanding between the leaders of the democracies and their counterparts of the USSR was the insistence of the former to apply the criterion of their internal experience to the Soviet nomenclature. This was a very wrong conception. The second generation of Soviet leaders was formed in a past that would be unimaginable in democracies. As servants of Stalin they had received a bad psychological formation. Only the balm of boundless ambition could have tolerated the perpetual sense of terror of capital punishment or life in the gulag for the slightest misstep—even for a change in policy made by the dictator himself.

The pathological mistrust that had become a way of life in the Soviet nomenclature characterized their attitude even in the post-Stalin phase. Stalin's successors spent almost five years in their struggle for power: in 1953, Beria was executed; in 1955, Malenkovi was removed from his post; in 1957 Khrushchev won over the so-called anti-party group of Molotov, Kaganov, Shepilov, and Malenkov, and in 1958 he secured absolute power with the removal of Zhukov. Even Khrushchev's condemnation of Stalin could have signaled a softening of Communism, but he also wielded it openly as a weapon against Stalin's former colleagues, who represented his main opposition, and as a means of establishing of control over the Communist Party.[26]

Another reason for Churchill's failure was the danger that his policy posed for Western unity, especially for the success of KEM. By raising the specter of a Peace Treaty for Germany, Churchill gave opponents of Germany's rearmament an excellent excuse for more time. By December – with American talks of abandoning Germany – it became clear that KEM's problems had the potential to cause a deep division in the Western world.[27]

Churchill's last personal secretary shared the same opinion in his memoirs: 'At the time I thought that Winston Churchill was right to insist on a meeting with the new Soviet leaders, and that the opposition of the Americans and the British Foreign Office was based on faulty reasoning, if not on jealousy of the Prime Minister. Now, after fuller knowledge of the matter, we have come to the conclusion that such an adventure would have been very dangerous, because a possible

[26]Henry Kissinger. Diplomacy. Central European University. (Tirana , 1999) ff. 517-518
[27]John W. Young, p. 910.

success would have weakened the Western Alliance without providing any balance on the part of the Soviets to withdraw from their goals, their aggressiveness.'[28]

There are some experiments in diplomacy that cannot be tried because failure carries irreversible risks.[29] Therefore, the leaders of the US and Western countries did not allow any significant initiative and in the process prevented a serious attempt to exploit the situation after the death of Stalin, while maintaining the cohesion of the Atlantic Alliance.

THE GREAT STATESMAN

The story of Bermuda was Churchill's hope for a summit with the Soviet Union in 1953. His push for such a summit set Bermuda to meet in May, his belief in face-to-face, open-ended diplomatic meetings resulted in a poorly organized structure of the conference, and the issue of talks with Russia became the main topic of the meeting. It is not true to say that everyone else had negative attitudes about talks with Moscow: the Americans, the French and the British Foreign Office were all willing to hold conditional talks with Russia. But it is fair to say that they did not expect any constructive results from these talks.

Churchill's faith in talks with the Russians extended beyond Bermuda, although it did not achieve any success. After April 1954, he regained confidence in talks with Moscow, and in June, in the United States, he tried to persuade President Eisenhower and Secretary Dulles to act once more. Again, his plan divided the Western alliance and the British Cabinet - in July 1954, Lord Salisbury threatened to resign over the issue - and again Churchill failed to arrange talks with Soviet leaders. When the much-desired summit was finally reached in Geneva in July 1955, Winston Churchill was no longer Prime Minister and it was Eisenhower who was most optimistic about the 'Geneva spirit' and détente – an optimism that was not supported by subsequent events.

The Geneva High Level meeting turned out to be far from what Churchill had proposed. Instead of examining the causes of the tension, the leaders participating in the meeting only mentioned the issues that pierced the Cold War. The agenda oscillated between attempts to score propaganda points and the demand to solve East-West problems with an amateur psychology.

[28]Anthony Montague Browne. Long Sunset. Memoirs of Winston Churchill's last private secretary. Cassell, London, 1995, p 158.
[29]Henry Kissinger, p. 506.

Eisenhower and Dulles, skillfully and persistently, invalidated what was left of Stalin's Peace Notes and Churchill's eloquent calls for a high-level meeting, insisting on specific solutions to equally specific problems. But in the end they concluded that waiting for internal Soviet change sent too harsh a message and that creating alternative negotiating positions could be too divisive.[30]

In fact, during his last months in office, the Prime Minister differed little on the surface with Eden and Eisenhower regarding foreign policy toward the Soviet Union. In fact, it was Churchill himself who started insulting the Soviet leaders more during this period. In November 1954, Churchill gave a speech at Woodford in which he stated that he had ordered the stockpiling of German arms at the end of the war, with the aim of rearming the Germans for a new war with Russia.

In conclusion, the question arises whether perhaps Churchill's experience with the proposals for talks with Russia, the main reason that brought him back to the post of prime minister in mid-1953, was in itself the clearest indicator that he should have resigned as British prime minister during that time. He was old, tired, getting sicker day by day. His insistence on peace with Russia led him to the point of arrogance, overconfident of his own power and importance, not listening to the opinions and advice of his friends and allies. His impetuosity and arrogance in pursuit of his goal weakened his case in the Cabinet, where many members believed that he had violated several constitutional conventions by his actions. Churchill's interests in détente were true, but the Prime Minister seemed to be living in the past, hoping to attend summits that decided the fate of the world as he had done during the war, but now he was unable to face the problems of his ill health with the opposition of a professional civil service, the Cabinet, and other Western leaders to his policies.

But what is most important about all of Winston Churchill's efforts is that the Prime Minister still remained a great man, relentlessly pursuing great ideas against all odds, as he always had. Arrogance, self-confidence, and refusal to follow the crowd were not new things to him: they were the foundations of his greatest triumphs. In a way, his faith in diplomacy may have been fueled by a desire to relive those triumphs, but on the other hand, his policies were a departure and a breath of fresh air from the hopeless situation offered by the Cold War.

Greatness can be found in failures as well as in achievements, and although Churchill's diplomacy with Russia during the period 1951-1955 fell short of its goal, it in no way detracts from his reputation as one of the greatest men of all time, the state in the twentieth century.

[30]Henry Kissinger, p. 516.

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