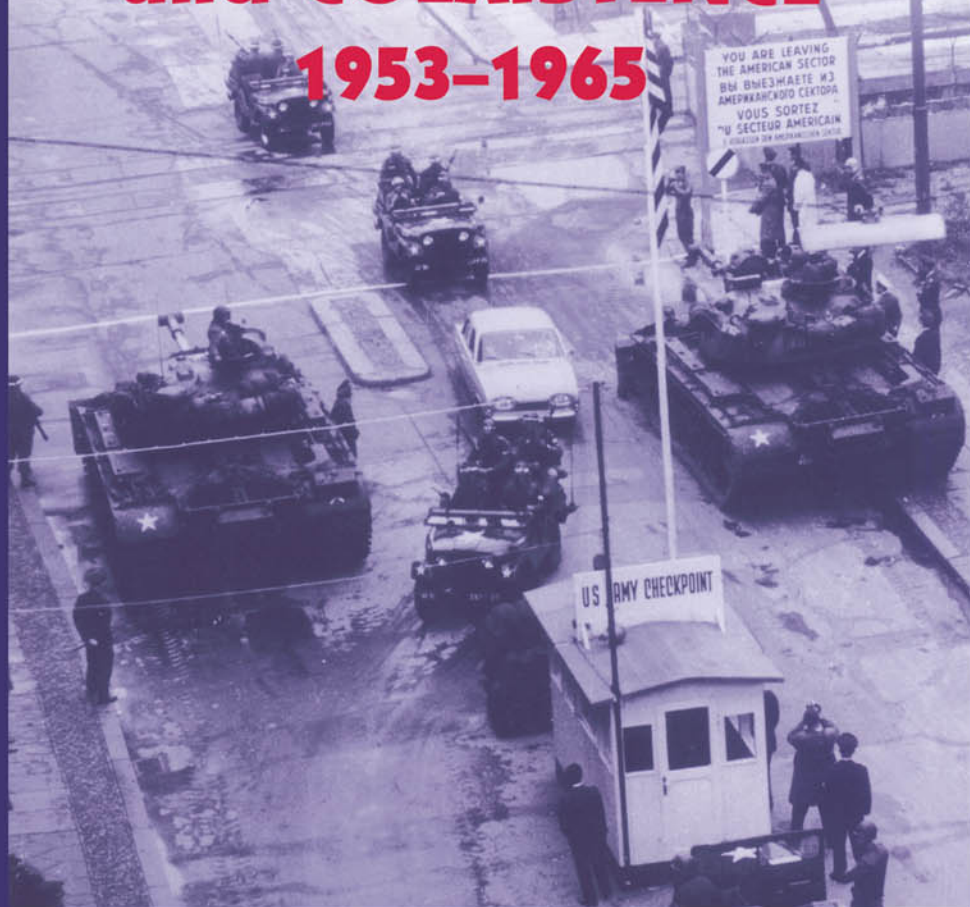


# EUROPE, COLD WAR and COEXISTENCE 1953–1965



Editor

**Wilfried Loth**

EUROPE, COLD WAR AND COEXISTENCE  
1953–1965

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Editor:

WILFRIED LOTH  
*University of Essen*



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# Contents

Series Editor's Preface	vii
Notes on Contributors	ix
Abbreviations	xi
Introduction	1
PART I: EUROPE IN THE 'FIRST DÉTENTE', 1953–58	
1 Britain as a Bridge between East and West <i>Antonio Varsori</i>	5
2 Adenauer's Final Western Choice, 1955–58 <i>Wilfried Loth</i>	21
PART II: EUROPEAN REACTIONS TO THE BERLIN AND CUBAN CRISES, 1958–62	
3 Adenauer and Nuclear Deterrence <i>Klaus Schwabe</i>	33
4 France, NATO and the Algerian War <i>Irwin M. Wall</i>	52
5 De Gaulle's Handling of the Berlin and Cuban Crises <i>Maurice Vaïsse</i>	63
6 Cold War Crises and Public Opinion: West European Public Opinion and the Berlin Wall, 1961 <i>Eckart Conze</i>	76
7 The Italian Communist Party between East and West, 1960–64 <i>Silvio Pons</i>	94

## PART III: EUROPE IN SEARCH OF DÉTENTE, 1962–65

- |    |  |     |
|----|--|-----|
| 8  | Britain, East Germany and Détente: British Policy toward the GDR and West Germany's 'Policy of Movement', 1955–65<br><i>Klaus Larres</i>                           | 105 |
| 9  | 'Sole Master of the Western Nuclear Strength'? The United States, Western Europe and the Elusiveness of a European Defence Identity, 1959–64<br><i>Ralph Dietl</i> | 127 |
| 10 | De Gaulle's France and the Soviet Union from Conflict to Détente<br><i>Georges-Henri Soutou</i>  | 170 |
| 11 | Khrushchev: Contemporary Perspectives in the Western Press<br><i>Elena Dundovich</i>   | 187 |
| 12 | The Western European Communist Parties in the Cold War, 1957–68<br><i>Marie-Pierre Rey</i>   | 200 |
| 13 | Détente, the Superpowers and their Allies, 1962–64<br><i>Vojtech Mastny</i>  | 213 |

## PART IV: DIRECT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE

- |    |   |     |
|----|---|-----|
| 14 | Soviet Union, Finland and the 'Northern Balance', 1957–63<br><i>Seppo Hentilä</i>   | 236 |
| 15 | Western Europe and Negotiations on Arms Control: The Anglo-Americans and the Evolving Concept of European Security, 1963–68<br><i>Marilena Gala</i> | 254 |
| 16 | Gerhard Schröder and the First 'Ostpolitik'<br><i>Torsten Oppelland</i>   | 270 |
| 17 | The East—West Problem as Seen from Berlin: Willy Brandt's Early <i>Ostpolitik</i><br><i>Gottfried Niedhart</i>                                      | 281 |

Index	293
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## Series Editor's Preface

The European origins of *détente* have long been a key research area for those historians who believe that the Cold War was more than just a superpower conflict. By attempting to find the reasons why European leaders developed their own concepts of the need for confidence-building and stability between the military blocs roughly in parallel with those that emerged in the United States and the Soviet Union, European Cold War historians want to stress both the autonomy and the inter-relationship between continental and superpower causes in the new 1960s direction in international politics. This re-evaluation is a significant project, because it promises a new and better understanding of what was perhaps the crucial turning point in Cold War history.

The present volume concentrates on explaining why, in many different West European countries, the period from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s saw attempts at improving relations across the Iron Curtain. Most of these attempts may have been sporadic and contradictory, and there are only a few cases where the policies left a lasting legacy. But the beginning of a reconsideration of the methods that could be used in inter-bloc diplomacy signalled a willingness—on the side of some European policymakers—to move beyond the hardline Cold War confrontation of the Stalin era.

Many of the means by which a reduction of tension could be achieved were—in the minds of key leaders—economic rather than political. By the mid-1950s the long-awaited West European post-war economic recovery had started, and it was thought that the new economic potential of the West had something to offer to the Soviet-controlled states in Eastern Europe. Perhaps even more importantly, economic progress increased the self-confidence of West European leaders, in the sense that they not only seemed to win the confrontation with Communism in their own countries, but also that their systems would be able to out-produce and out-compete the socialist economies of the East (something that had been in no way given in the first post-war decade).

Second, there were the new Soviet European policies that emerged immediately after Stalin's death in 1953. In Moscow, everyone in the new leadership agreed that the Soviet Union needed to decrease the tension with Western Europe, in part in order to get European assistance in their attempts at an even more significant *détente* with the United States, but also because of long-



term hopes of detaching key West European countries from the Atlantic alliance. Generally, the Soviet overtures were seen as much more significant by European leaders than by the US administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, and—as this volume shows—even the 1956 Soviet invasion of Hungary did not significantly reduce the hopes for an improved East—West relationship.

Third, during the second Cold War decade some of the key countries of Western Europe had started finding their own voice in international affairs. As the immediate impact of the last war receded, a number of leaders on both sides of the bourgeois-socialist divide began sensing that avoiding a new war in Europe was as much their responsibility as that of the superpowers. To many, the attempts at forging large-scale plans for European economic cooperation were steps in that direction, by pointing to how Germany and Italy—former enemy countries—could become integrated peacefully into a larger European economic context that also had political dimensions. Then, under Charles de Gaulle, there was the re-emergence of a self-consciously independent French foreign policy, which—as it slowly wound its way out from the disastrous attempts at keeping its empire—became a forerunner for a greater independence for Europe both in political and in defence matters.

Ironically, as this volume shows, the gradual recognition within Europe that the transatlantic alliance was here to stay contributed significantly to the willingness of West European leaders to engage in moves towards a European détente. As long as the fear remained that Washington could disengage from a Europe that was becoming increasingly more prosperous and therefore, seemingly, better equipped to cover its own defence needs, leaders in Paris, Bonn and, for that matter, in London, felt that engaging in any diplomacy with the East on their own was an unnecessarily risky business. Dispelling the notion of an American withdrawal was a slow process, and it could be argued that it was not complete until the new Democratic administration of John F. Kennedy signalled a renewed commitment to Europe in 1961–62.

In a book like this, where the main purpose is to seek the origins of something that came into full bloom much later, especially with Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* during the late 1960s and early 1970s, there is always a danger of reading history backwards. My sense is that the contributors have avoided that trap, especially because so many of them are aiming at telling the story of why the early attempts at détente failed. Still, for the reader it is probably useful to reflect for himself or herself on the period presented here in terms of that later era, and to ask questions about what had to change in order for Western Europe to play the much more active role in determining the future of the continent that it filled in the third decade of the Cold War.

*Odd Arne Westad*  
*Series Editor*

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# Abbreviations

ANF	Atlantic Nuclear Forces
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Berliner-Zeitung</i>
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
CFSP	Common Foreign and Security Policy
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CSU	Christian Social Union
DDF	Documents Diplomatiques Français
ECSC	European Coal and Steel Community
EEC	European Economic Community
EDC	European Defence Community
EDI	European Defence Identity
EDP	European Defence Policy
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ENDC	Eighteen-Nation Disarmament Committee
EPU	European Political Union
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
ERP	European Recovery Programme
ESDI	European Security and Defence Identity
<i>FAZ</i>	<i>Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung</i>
FBI	Federation of British Industry
FCMA	Friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance
FDP	Free Democratic Party
FLN	National Liberation Front
FRUS	<i>Foreign Relations of the United States</i>
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany

FTA	Free Trade Area
GDR	German Democratic Republic
GPRA	Algerian provisional government
ID	International Department
IRBMs	Intermediate Range Ballistic Missiles
KfA	Kammer für Aussenhandel
MAE	Ministère des Affaires étrangères
MLF	Multilateral Nuclear Force
MP	Member of Parliament
NADET	NATO deterrent force
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NFZ	Nuclear-free zone
NNF	NATO nuclear force
NPA	National People's Army
PCF	French Communist Party
PCI	Italian Communist Party
POWs	Prisoners of war
PRO	Public Record Office
SAC	Standing Armaments Committee
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander, Europe
SED	Socialist Unionist Party, East Germany
SPD	Social Democratic Party
UN	United Nations
UNO	United Nations Organization
WEU	Western European Union
WU	Western Union

# Introduction

This book is about the role of Europeans in the Cold War—the role of European governments and of European societies. The thesis with which we begin is that Europeans were not merely objects of the Cold War—not simply followers of the United States or of the Soviet Union—but exercised real influence, and oftentimes that influence was decisive. The contributions to this volume seek to answer the question of what the Europeans' role looked like in detail. Did they aggravate the conflict, or did they contain it? Were they able to maintain their independence and achieve security? Or did the Europeans become victims of the Cold War after all?

In using the term 'Europeans', we are not only referring to Western Europeans, as was long the case in the Western historiography of the Cold War. We have considered the neutral countries as well as the countries of the Soviet bloc in particular. We believe that the history of the Europeans in the Cold War can also be read as the prehistory of the present, that is, as a contribution to the history of overcoming the Cold War.

In this respect, the years from 1953 to 1965, which receive special consideration in this volume, can be seen as a crucial period in the history of the Cold War. Superficially, they can be regarded as the 'Khrushchev Era'. Beyond that, these years were particularly marked by the struggle for a regulated coexistence in a world of blocs. An initial effort to find a temporary arrangement failed due to German desires to overcome quickly the *status quo* on the German question. When, however, the crises over Berlin and over Cuba demonstrated the danger of an unintended nuclear war, then at least a tacit arrangement becomes possible. Of course, it was based on a system dominated by a nuclear arms race, a development which the actors of the late 1950s and early 1960s were unable to avoid.

That in itself already indicates the central role of Konrad Adenauer. This volume further elucidates that role in so far as it shows that the West German chancellor played at high risk and for a short time was willing to agree to the demilitarization of Central Europe (Wilfried Loth). However, he shied away from the risk of nuclear war; therefore, he was at worst (but only at worst) willing to agree to a Two-State-Arrangement on the German question and a United Nations (UN) status for Berlin (Klaus Schwabe).

This volume offers essential new information on the role of the European communists. The Western communist parties' strong financial and psychological dependence on the Moscow centre (Marie-Pierre Rey) did not keep its leaders from taking sides on controversial issues within the Soviet ruling circle. With new finds made in Eastern European archives, Vojtech Mastny gives greater emphasis to an impression earlier offered by Hope Harrison, namely, that Walter Ulbricht was the driving force behind the second Berlin crisis. The stabilization of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) thus has to be considered Khrushchev's real intention.

The observation that two Western European powers, the UK and France, in fact made considerable efforts to establish a peaceful order in Europe but for the most part failed is another important result of the studies presented in this volume. Their lack of success was partially due to Khrushchev's preference for coming to agreements with the USA and also with West Germany (Antonio Varsori, Georges-Henri Soutou). However, exaggerated notions of both UK and French hegemony in Europe also had a negative tinge. Irvin Wall highlights the late colonial notions of 'Eurafrica' that motivated France at the time of the Algerian war. Maurice Vaisse shows that during the Berlin crisis, de Gaulle argued against negotiations with the Soviet Union in an attempt to tie the West Germans to France strongly and irrevocably.

The 'neue Ostpolitik' (new Eastern policy) of the Federal Republic appears from this perspective to be the closing of a gap left by the overly ambitious policy of the UK and especially of France. Gottfried Niedhart demonstrates that Willy Brandt developed his concept even before the shock about Western behaviour after the building of the Berlin Wall. Eckart Conze makes plain how Brandt prepared the foundations with confidence-building measures. Torsten Oppelland explains how Gerhard Schröder contributed to establishing the policy despite all the limitations of his approach. If at the beginning of the years under discussion the Germans had served as a stumbling bloc on the road to détente, they now grew into a more productive role. It first took effect when the West German government decided to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (Marilena Gala).

In the period under investigation, contacts reaching beyond the blocs hardly played a part. The Finnish proposals for an understanding were highly productive (Seppo Hentilä), but little attention was paid to them. De Gaulle's appeals were mired in superficial rhetoric (Georges-Henri Soutou). It was the case that only economic interests persistently worked for the rapprochement of East and West over the long term. Until a later period, there would be no coordination of de-escalation efforts among the leaders of the US, the USSR or Europe.

This book is part of a major international research project on 'Europe, East and West, in the Cold War, 1943–1989'. It began in 1996 with an international conference in Florence entitled 'The Failure of Peace, 1943–1953', organized by Antonio Varsori.<sup>1</sup> In the second phase, Georges-Henri Soutou chaired a conference on 'The Times of the Cold War, 1949–1953', in Paris in 1998.<sup>2</sup> The

contributions to this volume, *Europe, Cold War and Coexistence, 1953–1965*, were initially discussed at a third conference which took place in October of 2001 in Essen. Further conferences to cover the Brezhnev era and the end of the Cold War will follow.

The editor would like to thank all those who have contributed to the success of this third phase of the enterprise. The Steering Committee, comprised of Vojtech Mastny, Klaus Schwabe, Georges-Henri Soutou and Antonio Varsori, provided valuable advice and important contributions. Jost Dülffer, Gustav Schmidt, Odd Arne Westad, Kathryn Weathersby and Natalia Yegorova served as section leaders and commentators and contributed to focusing the discussion. Christian Müller and Corinna Steinert supported me in the organization of the conference in Essen. Michaela Bachem-Rehm, Robert F. Hogg and Henning Türk carried out the copyediting of the contributions to this volume.

The conference in Essen was made possible by generous support from the Volkswagen Foundation and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft. Without their assistance, the international cooperation of historians from both East and West would not have been possible—and such cooperation is the prerequisite for an objective understanding of the Cold War.

## NOTES

- 1 The contributions were published in Antonio Varsori and Elena Calandri (eds), *The Failure of Peace in Europe, 1943–48*, Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave, 2002.
- 2 The contributions were published in Saki Dockrill, Robert Frank, Georges-Henri Soutou and Antonio Varson (eds), *L'Europe de l'Est et de l'Ouest dans la Guerre froide, 1948–1953*, Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2003.



PART I:

EUROPE IN THE ‘FIRST DÉTENTE’,  
1953–58

# Britain as a Bridge between East and West

*Antonio Varsori*

In late July of 1955, in the aftermath of the Geneva summit conference, British Prime Minister Anthony Eden had a talk with Evelyn Shuckburgh, at that time a senior Foreign Office official. The Conservative leader spoke about his experience at Geneva, saying that in his opinion, ‘the Russians were looking ahead, and saw in ten or twenty years a very strong China to the east of them and perhaps a very strong Germany to the West, and were looking for someone to hold their hands a little. They could not expect anything from the USA, and they saw that the French were no use, so they were looking for us.’<sup>1</sup> This statement is representative of the attitudes, feelings, hopes, and misperceptions which characterized Britain’s policy toward the Eastern bloc and especially the Soviet Union during the early détente period. Furthermore, it may be argued that Britain played a leading part in favouring the end of the Cold War in Europe, although it would be difficult to claim that British decision makers gained much for their efforts.<sup>2</sup>

It would in fact be partially misleading to focus our attention only on the period from 1953 to 1956, that is, the two-and-a-half years from the death of Stalin to the crises over the Suez and Budapest. In order to understand the UK’s policy during those crucial years, it would be of some help to go back to an earlier period. In the immediate postwar years, the Labour Cabinet did its best to create a new world order which could be based on some form of agreement not only with the USA and France but also with the Soviet Union.<sup>3</sup> It was especially on the European continent that the UK was confronted with a frightening power vacuum which could easily be filled only by the Soviet Union, British decision makers could not be sure of the USA’s intentions, and a return to the isolationist tradition could not be excluded. In spite of Churchill’s efforts in the late stages of the war, France was perceived as a defeated nation whose restoration as a great power would be an almost impossible task. Only the UK could counter Soviet ambitions to achieve hegemony over the whole European continent. At the same time, British decision makers were well aware of their nation’s plight, which weakened their power despite the fact that the UK was still the centre of a great empire.<sup>4</sup> The Attlee government could not oppose both Soviet military strength and Stalin’s political prestige, a consequence of the ‘great patriotic war’ and of

the victory over Nazi Germany; from an ideological viewpoint, Labour's peaceful 'revolution' was no match for the almost religious appeal of the communist faith with its millions of loyal militants. Last but not least, wide sectors of British public opinion saw the Soviet Union as the gallant ally which had greatly contributed to the final victory rather than as a powerful and unfriendly competitor.<sup>5</sup>

So diplomacy and compromise were the tools through which London tried to create a lasting peace—especially on the European continent—which would safeguard Britain's imperial interests and allow the Labour Party to achieve its domestic goals.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the British leaders desperately needed time to implement the Labour social and political programme, to prompt the nation's economic recovery, and to reform the Empire; a stable settlement on the European scene would offer such a chance. In this regard, Britain tried to deal with the Soviet Union on the basis of traditional power politics—in Whitehall, it was hoped that the war had transformed the USSR into Russia and Stalin into a sort of Red Tsar.<sup>7</sup> Very early, however, British leaders realized that it would be quite difficult to achieve a lasting settlement with the Soviet Union. They thought that Stalin's policy was largely shaped by ideological bias which led Moscow toward an aggressive strategy, that is, toward conflict with the West. This interpretation was nothing new but rather the rediscovery of deeply rooted fears and beliefs which had their origins in the 1920s.<sup>8</sup> But only the USA had the power and means to counter effectively Stalin's imperial ambitions, and in 1947 the British Foreign Office and its head, Ernest Bevin, did their best in order to pave the way for the USA's involvement on the European scene.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, the Truman administration were already working out a 'revolution' of the USA's international role, dramatically marked by developments such as the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, and later the creation of the North Atlantic Alliance.<sup>10</sup> Britain played a significant role in this process: the Truman Doctrine was prompted by London's appeal concerning the deteriorating situation in Greece<sup>11</sup>; the British favoured the launching of the Marshall Plan, and the UK was the most important recipient of that ERP (European Recovery Programme) aid.<sup>12</sup> Bevin also launched the plan for a Western Union and concurred in shaping the main characteristics of the Atlantic alliance.<sup>13</sup> That was the beginning of the 'special relationship'. In 1948, Churchill, although at that time in the opposition, skilfully sketched out the priorities of the UK's foreign policy when he spoke of the three interlocking 'circles' (that is, the 'special relationship', the Commonwealth and Western Europe).<sup>14</sup> The 'special relationship' and the Cold War were in fact closely linked, and both elements became almost vital factors of Britain's foreign policy, as the Cold War was at the root of the 'special relationship', and the Anglo-American alliance, supported by the Commonwealth, gave new life to London's role as a great power with worldwide responsibilities and interests. In late 1949, the USA and Britain appeared to be the two pillars of a powerful transatlantic partnership, of an 'Atlantic community'.<sup>15</sup>

But Britain's 'special' position rapidly eroded. The Korean War marked a turning point in the Cold War, as the USA on the one hand were directly involved in the Far East and on the other they were very mindful of the communist threat to Central Europe, that is, to West Germany. In the latter case, the Truman administration singled out as their main goals West Germany's rearmament and closer economic, political and military integration among the nations of Western Europe. French fears and ambitions led the Fourth Republic's decision-makers to support Jean Monnet's 'functionalist' projects, and the French government launched both the Schuman Plan and the Pleven Plan.<sup>16</sup> So from the middle of 1950, West Germany's role became the main concern of the Truman administration, and France became the most important factor in US policy on Western Europe.<sup>17</sup> For their part, British leaders rejected London's involvement in both the Schuman Plan and the Pleven Plan, not only as a consequence of their dislike of vague 'federalist' projects but also on the ground that such a commitment would jeopardize Britain's world role.<sup>18</sup> That may be partially true, but for some time the creation of an effective Western European system appeared to be in the hands of French and West German decision makers as well as the US administration.

In the Far East, the British supported the political and military initiatives developed by Washington, but by late 1950, the Labour Cabinet began to be worried about General McArthur's aggressive strategy which could lead to a major nuclear war.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, they could not forget the 'Commonwealth circle' and, in this regard, it was often difficult to reconcile the Anglo-American 'special relationship' with the close ties developed with some Asian members of the Commonwealth, especially Nehru's India, which had serious doubts about the USA's tough policy toward Communist China.<sup>20</sup> Last but not least, a serious illness led to Bevin's resignation; his substitute, Herbert Morrison, lacked experience, making the Foreign Office appear less effective.

In the autumn of 1951, the Conservatives won the general elections: Churchill was appointed prime minister and Eden was once again his foreign secretary.<sup>21</sup> Churchill was obviously interested in foreign policy, but his relationship with Eden was less smooth than in the war years, as the former was becoming an old man who clung to power and the latter was not happy at his being the prime minister's 'heir apparent', an heir who was waiting for a position which that old man had no intention of giving up.<sup>22</sup> In spite of those personal difficulties, both Churchill and Eden had a common goal: the confirmation of Britain as a world power which could stand with both the USA and the USSR. They were aware of their nation's weaknesses, but they still hoped to have some chance of achieving such an ambitious goal. In fact, Churchill and Eden developed different strategies. The prime minister seemed to nurture a sort of dream: to be remembered by posterity as a man of peace through his ending of the Cold War; dialogue with Moscow was the main goal of his 'last campaign'.<sup>23</sup> In case of a successful outcome of his strategy, Britain would impose itself at the centre of the international stage. He hoped that he could win Washington's support for his

policy. Eden did not share Churchill's enthusiasms and was more concerned about the numerous problems which London had to face in various areas, from the Middle East, where Britain's relations with Egypt were more and more strained, to South East Asia, where the British were facing a communist guerrilla movement in Malaya. Additionally, the Foreign Office's evaluations confirmed the widespread opinion that Stalin was not interested in starting any dialogue with the West, and it is not surprising that the famous Stalin Note of March 1952 was rejected by Whitehall as a mere propaganda move.<sup>24</sup> On the other hand, creation of an effective Western European defence system was still perceived as the only instrument for constructing a strong bulwark against Moscow's aggressive policies. So, at least for the time being, Whitehall decided to be faithful to the close alliance with the USA and to cooperate with Washington on the European scene. The British cabinet gave growing support to the project for a European Defence Community (EDC), but the launching of the so-called Eden Plan for the revival of the Council of Europe, although doomed to failure, showed that the foreign secretary did not consider the 'functionalist' approach the only way toward European cooperation and that Britain wished to play some role in any future Western European political structure.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, the Republican victory at the US presidential elections in late 1952 and the death of Stalin in early 1953 prompted a dramatic development in Britain's policy toward the Eastern bloc. At first, Churchill hoped that it would be possible to renew close contacts with Eisenhower and to influence the new US administration's position toward the USSR, but he quickly discovered that the Republican administration was committed to a militant anti-communist policy which openly clashed with the prime minister's aspirations.<sup>26</sup> In Washington's opinion, the Western European allies had to show a more forthcoming attitude in their support of the 'Cold War' strategy under the firm leadership of the USA.<sup>27</sup> But the death of Stalin and the early statements by the new Soviet leaders seemed to mark a significant change in Moscow's position; it was the opportunity that the prime minister had been waiting for, and he focused his attention and hopes more and more on starting a dialogue with the Soviet Union.<sup>28</sup> As Eden was seriously ill and out of office, Churchill felt himself free to launch an ambitious foreign policy initiative. In May of 1953, he gave an important speech in the House of Commons in which he put forward the suggestion for a summit conference on the model of the wartime big three meetings in order to resolve the major international problems of the time. The Cabinet had doubts about the wisdom of the prime minister's proposal and Eden's reaction was negative as he thought that the project was premature and ill-conceived.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the US administration disagreed with Churchill's position as both Eisenhower and John Foster Dulles argued that the long-term goal of the new Soviet leadership was still the communist domination of the world and that the Kremlin had only changed its tactics.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, Western European public opinion warmly welcomed Churchill's move, which had raised great expectations. The prime minister's initiative did not, however,

have any immediate consequences: the USA stated that before starting any talks with Moscow, the Western powers would have to work out a common policy. France wanted to be involved in any future Western initiative; Churchill's and Eisenhower's illnesses led to a delay in the Western decision-making process. Also, everyone in Washington, London and Paris thought it better to wait for the outcome of West Germany's elections, due to be held in September 1953, which would influence the fate of the EDC treaty.

During the second half of 1953, there appeared to be a rapprochement between Churchill and Eden: 'détente' with Moscow was not a goal 'per se', at least in Eden's opinion; it was nevertheless a fundamental step in a wider strategy, the vital aim of which was the defence of Britain's role as a world power. Beyond Churchill's belief in the almost thaumaturgical role of a summit conference, numerous factors seemed to confirm the British viewpoint. In Whitehall, it was hoped that Soviet leaders would be more interested in developing contacts with the British Cabinet rather than with a US administration, which was still committed to the 'New Look' and appeared to be influenced by the right wing of the Republican Party.<sup>31</sup> On the basis of a realistic approach, however, the British thought that any future negotiation with the Soviet Union would be a hard bargain and, as a sort of prerequisite, the Western powers had to achieve a 'position of strength', which meant the implementation of an effective Western European defence system.<sup>32</sup> In 1953, such a goal was closely tied to the ratification of the EDC treaty, although most British decision-makers were more interested in West Germany's rearmament and in the expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) than in the creation of a European army, not to speak of a European Political Community.<sup>33</sup> Although not a very clear-cut aspect of British foreign policy in 1953, Eden and the Foreign Office did realize that the West had to make some concessions to the Soviets, but it was thought that the recognition of the Soviet Union as a decent international actor could be enough. Numerous Western decision makers opined that the new Soviet leadership was weak in comparison to Stalin and that it was also in Moscow's interest to ease international tensions. In Whitehall's view, the Kremlin was mainly concerned about Europe, especially Germany. Some form of joint agreement about Germany's future could be the major subject of talks between the USSR and the three Western powers, and some sort of European security system would be the almost obvious consequence of a rapprochement between East and West. Last but not least, if there were a successful outcome of Britain's policy, London would have more resources at its disposal in order to solve the numerous problems it was facing outside Europe in the 'imperial' context. Such a 'realistic' approach was based on the assumption that Moscow's foreign policy would be shaped less by ideology and more by 'realpolitik'. In light of that, it may be of some interest to stress the cautious British reaction to the Soviet suppression of the uprising in East Berlin in June of 1953; on this occasion, Churchill's words seemed to show his understanding of the Soviet Union's 'responsibilities' as an occupying power and the need to maintain 'law and order'.<sup>34</sup>

Until the middle of 1954, in fact, the Soviets' achievement of a position of strength was regarded as an unavoidable prerequisite, and it was still very difficult to understand what would be the outcome of the struggle for power taking place in Moscow. At the Bermuda three-power conference in December of 1953, Churchill and Eden put strong pressure on Laniel and Bidault in order to get France to ratify the EDC treaty. The British leaders' position did not differ very much from Eisenhower's and Dulles' attitude.<sup>35</sup> At the Berlin foreign ministers' conference on the German question (January–February 1954), Eden consistently stuck to the plan which had been worked out by the three Western powers; this was based on the hypothesis of free elections in the whole German territory and was rejected by the Soviet delegation.<sup>36</sup> In that same period, however, it was decided that in a few months a conference would be convened on the Korean and Indochina crises. That meeting opened in April 1954 in Geneva, and all the parties involved in both questions—including the major communist powers, the USSR and Communist China—took part in the conference. Discussions on the Korean question almost immediately ended in failure, but it must not be forgotten that in 1953, despite the 'New Look' rhetoric, an armistice had been agreed with the consent of the United States. So the attention of the conference was focused on the Indochina crisis; for their part, the French had hoped that the meeting would offer them the chance for a diplomatic solution to an endless war which was becoming more and more unpopular and burdensome. Military developments, that is, the siege of the French garrison at Dien Bien Phu, highlighted the weakness of France's position, however. The Laniel government put strong pressure on the Eisenhower administration for US military intervention to relieve the besieged garrison. But US officials had no intention of becoming directly involved in the Indochina crisis, and they asked the British for political and military support, while warning the French that they could not give up their military responsibilities in South East Asia. Furthermore, the US delegation's position at the Geneva conference hardened due to fears that the French would accept a diplomatic solution, which would threaten the Western position in Asia to the advantage of both the Soviet Union and Communist China.<sup>37</sup> Both Churchill and Eden were irritated by the US attitude; the British thought that Western military intervention in Indochina would be a mistake, but, in their opinion, the Eisenhower administration's rigid position at Geneva was useless and only diplomacy could offer a way out for the West.<sup>38</sup> It was especially the case that Eden, who was playing a leading part in the negotiations, hoped that the outcome of the conference could be successful: a lessening of the tensions in the Far East would have positive consequences for Britain's position in those areas where it still had significant interests, from Hong Kong to Singapore to Malaya, not to speak of the still important partnership with India.<sup>39</sup>

The fall of Dien Bien Phu led to Laniel's resignation and to the appointment of Pierre Mendès France, whose first task was resolution of both the Indochina crisis and the 'querelle de la CED'. A 'peace with honour' was quickly achieved in Indochina, but the Geneva agreements were perceived in Washington as

'treason'. Dulles suspected that Mendès France had agreed to a 'global trade-off' with both the Soviet Union and Communist China in the form of Moscow's and Peking's forthcoming attitude on the Indochina question and France's abandonment of its commitment to ratifying the EDC. In London, however, the Geneva agreements were regarded as a positive compromise solution; Eden was proud of his diplomatic skill, which enhanced both his domestic and international position. In his opinion, the Soviet delegation had behaved sensibly; moreover, Britain and the Soviet Union would be the co-guarantors of the implementation of the Geneva agreements. Although there were some suspicions about the French leader's entourage, the British thought that the new French government's attitude could have positive consequences for Britain's international interests. Mendès France favoured the setting-up of close ties with London, and he had scant confidence in functionalist integration. In Whitehall, it was also thought that Britain and France as imperial powers shared some common interests—from the Middle East to the Far East—which, in their opinion, did not coincide with those pursued by the US administration.<sup>40</sup> So both nations were interested in promoting détente; such a development would confirm the two powers' independent role in the Western alliance, and they could move their scant resources from the European scene to the 'colonial' world. Those hopes were based on the assumptions that (a) Moscow was still focusing its attention on Europe, (b) the new Soviet leadership was weaker than Stalin had been, (c) a multi-polar international system where the USA would not be the only Western power would be in the Kremlin's interest. In two years' time, all those assumptions would be proven wrong.

Nevertheless, in late August 1954, when the French National Assembly rejected the EDC treaty—thus creating the worst crisis in the Western alliance before de Gaulle's decision to leave NATO—British leaders and especially Eden felt that this could become a precious opportunity for Britain and that Whitehall could play a leading role in shaping the Western system.<sup>41</sup> At first, the foreign secretary convinced Dulles to refrain from any retaliatory action against France. Then he launched a project based on West Germany's re-armament through Bonn's involvement in NATO and the creation of the Western European Union (WEU), which would include both the Federal Republic and Italy. Eden's plan was successful, and in late October 1954, the Paris agreement sealed West Germany's rearmament, the restoration of its sovereignty as well, its membership in both NATO and the WEU. The United States could be happy with the creation of an effective Western defence system; Germany had recovered the status of an independent nation; and France had saved its 'armée'. Moreover, because Adenauer's government had stated that it would give up its right to produce nuclear weapons, Paris could hope to maintain some form of military superiority over Germany. But Britain was the real winner. Whitehall had achieved all its goals: (a) the USA would maintain their commitment to Europe's defence, but Britain had confirmed its special role as a bridge between Washington and its European allies; (b) West Germany would be rearmed but with no independent



nuclear weapons and would be under the double control of NATO and the WEU; (c) the functionalist ‘approach’ to European integration which isolated Britain from Western Europe had been defeated; (d) a close Anglo-French ‘entente cordiale’ had been restored. In this same period, Britain and Egypt had also signed a treaty which seemed to solve the Suez Canal question, and Eden played a role in the resolution of the Trieste problem, thus confirming both his international prestige and growing role in the Tory government.<sup>42</sup> In the British cabinet’s opinion, the next step would be the exploitation of the ‘position of strength’ achieved in Europe as well as Britain’s diplomatic prestige in order to start a dialogue with Moscow and create a stable European settlement acceptable to the Soviets. All those goals were obviously tied to the ratification of the Paris agreements, and it is not surprising that until the final decision by the French parliament in the spring of 1955, London’s attitude was a cautious one; when in early 1955, Mendès France put pressure on the USA and Britain in order to launch an initiative toward the USSR, both Churchill and Eden disagreed with the French prime minister’s move, regarding it as premature.<sup>43</sup>

But it was the Soviet Union which seized the initiative in March 1955: The Soviet government summoned to Moscow the Austrian leaders in order to find a solution to the problem of Austria. The Soviets were now eager to accept an end to the four-power occupation, but Austria would become a neutral state, a compromise which was also in Austria’s interest. The Kremlin’s move led to four-power negotiations whose outcome was the signature of the Austrian state treaty by the four foreign ministers, which took place in Vienna in mid May.<sup>44</sup> In the meantime, Churchill had at last decided to resign. Eden became prime minister in April, and his position was then strengthened by a general election which confirmed his leadership.<sup>45</sup> In Eden’s view, Moscow’s political activism, which was further demonstrated by Khrushchev’s visit to Belgrade, meant that the Soviet interest in détente was not only a propaganda move; furthermore, Whitehall thought that as a consequence of Malenkov’s resignation, Khrushchev was emerging as the leading personality and that this development would give more substance to Moscow’s foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> So Eden proposed to the Eisenhower administration and the French government that the Western powers seize the initiative to convene the summit conference which Churchill had dreamt of. Although the new French cabinet led by Edgar Faure obviously welcomed Eden’s proposal, as Paris hoped that such an initiative could delay West Germany’s rearmament, the US authorities showed scant enthusiasm, bowing to the European allies’ will only because they knew that Western public opinion strongly hoped that a new peaceful era would dawn in East–West relations and realized that the USA could not reject such an important initiative that could lead to détente.<sup>47</sup>

It is not possible here to examine in detail the diplomatic process which led to the Geneva conference nor to explore its proceedings. As far as Britain is concerned, Eden was the driving force in the Western camp.<sup>48</sup> Of course, the British would not act alone and instead carefully looked for a common Western

position—more precisely, a common Anglo-American position—but they were eager to shape the Western powers' strategy. In Whitehall's opinion, the summit could deal with all the major international problems, but the British were convinced that Soviet leaders would focus their interest on Europe and, to that end, Britain worked out a plan which, if accepted by the Soviets, could lead to Germany's reunification. The project was based on free elections on the whole German territory as well as on the creation of a demilitarized belt in Central Europe, comprising former East Germany as well as some parts of Czechoslovakia and Poland. To this could be added some guarantees about the stationing of NATO troops in Europe, as well as recognition of Soviet interests.<sup>49</sup> We may wonder whether Eden really believed that the Soviet leaders could comply with a project which would end Soviet control over East Germany. Perhaps Eden was influenced by some West German intelligence estimates that stressed alleged Soviet economic and political weakness. Moreover, it is likely that the British prime minister overrated the Kremlin's interest in achieving détente with the West at all costs. It was also the case that some British diplomats such as the ambassador in Moscow, Sir William Hayter, had a far less optimistic view of Soviet aims.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, most British decision makers seemed to believe that the Soviet leaders were interested in starting serious talks with the West, especially as far as Europe was concerned; Whitehall thought that Moscow wanted to be recognized as a reliable international partner and that Soviet leaders were eager to achieve a stable European settlement. Consequences of this evaluation included not only the Eden Plan but also British willingness to recognize a role for the USSR on the European continent and, in the long term, negotiate a European security system which would include the Soviet Union.

As is well known, the summit conference—despite the so-called 'Geneva spirit'—led to no practical consequences. Furthermore, the Soviet Union showed no interest in the Eden Plan, and on their coming back to Moscow, Khrushchev and Bulganin paid a visit to East Berlin, where they openly stated the Kremlin's support for the German Democratic Republic, a confirmation of how Germany's division suited Soviet interests.<sup>51</sup> This was underscored on the occasion of Adenauer's visit to Moscow in September of 1955. Eden was only partially disappointed by the political outcome of the Geneva conference, but he did appear to resent the reaction of Western public opinion, which had singled out the USA and the USSR as the two main actors. On the contrary, Eden still hoped that the USSR needed Britain and that a fruitful bilateral relationship could be worked out. He based this on the talks he had had with both Khrushchev and Bulganin.<sup>52</sup> The British cabinet invited the Soviet leaders to pay an official visit to Britain in early 1956. Khrushchev and Bulganin welcomed Eden's invitation, and, in London, it was often stressed that this would be the first visit by Soviet leaders to a great Western power. This decision appeared to confirm in British eyes the Soviet interest in Britain's international role.

Some episodes dampened Eden's optimism, however. In the autumn of 1955, Khrushchev and Bulganin paid a successful and much-publicized visit to Asia,

during which their speeches harshly criticized British imperialism; furthermore, they voiced Moscow's support for the process of decolonization.<sup>53</sup> A few months earlier, in late April, numerous Asian and African leaders had met in Bandung and had given birth to the movement of the non-aligned countries. A communist leader, Chou En-lai, had played a significant role at the Bandung Conference, stressing that the communist bloc regarded the 'Third World' countries, although ruled mostly by 'bourgeois' leaders, as reliable and valuable allies. Last but not least, 'non-alignment' and the fight against colonialism were becoming two important goals for Yugoslavia, with which the Conservative government had hoped to renew close ties.<sup>54</sup>

Some Foreign Office officials began to realise that Soviet foreign policy was radically changing: in the eyes of the Kremlin's leaders, the achievement of 'détente' in Europe was an instrument which gave them more room for manoeuvre in the 'Third World', where Khrushchev was eager to develop close alliances with newly independent nations. The Soviets showed a confident attitude that 'peaceful coexistence' would favour Soviet goals. Worse still, they appeared to single out the colonial role of Britain and France as the weak link in the Western chain, and, to that end, they thought it useful to exploit the nationalist, anti-colonialist feelings which were shaping the attitudes of Asian and African peoples.<sup>55</sup> Britain's reaction was slow and largely ineffective. Some diplomats warned Eden about the dangerous developments in Soviet foreign policy, and someone in Whitehall thought it perhaps better to cancel Khrushchev's visit to Britain, but this idea was quickly shelved.<sup>56</sup> For his part, Eden thought it possible to have a frank conversation with Khrushchev. It is of some interest to note that the outcome of the twentieth congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and Khrushchev's 'secret report' appeared to have a minor impact on Britain's decision-making.<sup>57</sup> The British cabinet now focused their attention on the Soviet attitude toward the 'Third World', especially the growing interest Moscow showed in the Middle East, where London's position was becoming weaker as a consequence of a rising tide of Arab nationalism, whose main standard-bearer was Nasser's Egypt. Soviet leaders openly criticized the Baghdad Pact, which London had joined in 1955.

In late April 1956, Khrushchev and Bulganin paid their official visit to Britain; in spite of a few minor incidents, the visit appeared to be successful.<sup>58</sup> There were numerous bi-lateral conversations, and Eden explained Britain's position frankly. He highlighted the positive aspects of Britain's colonial experience and stated that Middle East oil was vital for the British economy, so much so that the British 'were prepared to fight for it'. But Khrushchev did not back down from his position and, as a Foreign Office official wrote, 'He was quick to reach agreement on matters which he did not regard as important: but on "questions of principle"...he proved to be intransigent'.<sup>59</sup> It seemed to be the case that disruption of the British Empire was one of those 'questions of principle'. But Eden was under the illusion that he had

convinced Khrushchev of Britain's determination and capacity to defend its vital interests.<sup>60</sup>

A few weeks later, Nasser made a speech announcing his decision to nationalize the Suez Canal Company, a move which generated waves of popular enthusiasm in the whole Arab world. As is well known, his decision was the beginning of a crisis which would seal the end of Britain's leading role in the Middle East and would be a serious blow to London's prestige as a world power.<sup>61</sup> It is not surprising that, as the British were too involved in the Suez crisis, they appeared to show little interest in the Budapest uprising, which was perceived mainly as a development that would favour the British and French intervention against Nasser.<sup>62</sup> Although the Soviet Union loudly supported Egypt's position, the main reason for Britain's surrender to the will of the United Nations was the negative reaction of the US administration. In spite of that, the relationship between London and Moscow had radically changed. In late November, a Foreign Office official had a talk with the Soviet ambassador in London, Malik, who was critical of Britain's decision to freeze cultural and trade relations with the USSR in retaliation for the Soviet intervention against Hungary. The British diplomat got the impression that Malik's words could be easily translated into 'we are proud and we are strong; if you do not wish to have cultural exchanges or trade with us, so much the worse for you'.<sup>63</sup> Eden's policy toward the Soviet Union had ended in failure, and the new prime minister's early goal was now the restoration of the 'special relationship': *détente* was too serious a business to be left in the hands of the British or the French and from 1956 on, the East—West confrontation—and dialogue—appeared to be mainly a bi-polar affair.

In conclusion, it can be stated that between 1953 and 1956, Britain consistently tried to develop an autonomous policy toward the Soviet Union, a policy which, however, had its roots in previous experiences. If Churchill often appeared to be influenced by personal motives and by a kind of dream, Eden's policy was more coherent and seemed to be based on rational factors. Both leaders believed that their main goal was the confirmation of Britain's role as a great world power; this meant that London had to have a leading position in the international arena, that is, in the East—West conflict. Yet in the opinion of British decision makers, the Cold War, which in the late 1940s had strengthened London's international role, above all through the 'special relationship', was now weakening that position, in particular because they felt that it was becoming less and less easy to influence US authorities. In some areas of the world, moreover, British interests and opinions began to differ from those of Washington. The British leaders thought that once the Western system had been able to achieve a position of strength (that is, via West Germany's rearmament and the strengthening of NATO), the Western powers could begin some form of dialogue with the USSR. In London's interpretation, the new Soviet leaders were eager to establish some 'modus vivendi' with the West and to that end were focusing their attention on the European scene. This development in the Kremlin's attitude was perceived as the consequence of a lessening of the ideological characters

which had shaped Stalin's foreign policy. It is difficult to know whether Whitehall had a clearcut view of the main features of the agreement which could be achieved; the hope for Germany's reunification quickly vanished in the summer of 1955 in the face of the Kremlin's lack of interest; also, the hypothesis of a European security system was always very vague. It may be stated, however, that the British plans implied the Western recognition of Moscow's continued rule over most of East-Central Europe, as well as the existence of definite Soviet interests on the European continent. In fact, London's evaluation of Moscow's position was partly right—détente in Europe was in the Soviet leaders' interest, but, especially from 1955 onwards, Khrushchev hoped that a stable European settlement would offer him more room for manoeuvre in the Third World'. Furthermore, Soviet leaders were now convinced that their position had become stronger and that the real enemy—with which, however, it would be possible to negotiate—was the US administration, while Britain and France were only minor actors experiencing an unavoidable decline.

If Britain's aspiration to become a bridge between East and West—that is, to confirm its role as an autonomous international actor—was doomed to failure, and London reverted to the more modest role of significant pillar in the Western alliance, Britain's belief in its being able to develop some autonomous contact with the USSR did survive for a long while. As evidence of this, we may cite Macmillan's visit to Moscow, Harold Wilson's initiatives on finding a diplomatic solution to the Vietnam War through contacts with the Moscow leadership, and, last but not least, Thatcher's early interest in Gorbachev's policy. We may wonder, however, whether, from the mid-1950s, Moscow regarded Britain as a partner of any relevance.

## NOTES

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- 3 See our remarks in A.Varsori, 'Reflections on the Origins of the Cold War', in O. Westad (ed.), *Reviewing the Cold War: Approaches, Interpretations, Theory*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp. 281–302.
- 4 On Britain and the origins of the 'Cold War' in Europe, see D.Reynolds, 'Great Britain', in D.Reynolds (ed.), *The Origins of the Cold War in Europe: International Perspectives*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1994, pp. 77–95; V. Rothwell, *Britain and the Cold War 1941–47*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1982; see also the contributions by J.Kent and A.Lane, in A.Varsori and E.Calandri (eds), *The Failure of Peace in Europe 1943–48*, London: Palgrave, 2001. For an analysis which covers a longer period, see M. Trachtenberg, *A Constructed Peace*:

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  - 10 On the development of US foreign policy, see, for example, J.L.Gaddis, *The US and the Origins of the Cold War 1941–1947*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1972 and M.Leffler, *A Preponderance of Power: National Security, the Truman Administration and the Cold War*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992.
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- 27 For an overall analysis, see S.Dockrill, *Eisenhower's New Look National Security Policy, 1953–1961*, London: Macmillan, 1996.
- 28 A.Varsori, 'Britain and Stalin's Death', in Gori and Pons (eds), *The Soviet Union*, pp. 334–55.
- 29 On Churchill's speech, see Gilbert, *Never Despair*, pp. 827–45; on the Cabinet's attitude, see, for example, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), CAB 129/61, C (53)194, memorandum 'Policy toward the Soviet Union' by Lord Salisbury, 7 July 1953, top secret; on Eden's reaction, see Dutton, *Anthony Eden*, pp. 337–8.
- 30 *Foreign Relations of the United States 1952–1954*, vol. VIII, *Eastern Europe; Soviet Union; Eastern Mediterranean*, Washington: US Government Printing Office, 1988, see especially pp. 1099 ff.
- 31 PRO, CAB 129/61, memorandum C(53)187, 'Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Washington—Policy toward the Soviet Union and Germany', by Lord Salisbury, 3 July 1953, secret.
- 32 Britain appeared to support the EDC; see, for example, PRO, FO 800/778, memorandum ZP 12/27 G, 'Meetings with Mr. Dulles and Mr. Stassen—Meeting in the Foreign Office at 11 a.m. on 4th February, 1953', secret.
- 33 On Britain's attitude toward the EDC, see, for example, PRO, CAB 129/60 memorandum C(53)108, 'The European Defence Community and European Unity', by H. Macmillan, 19 March 1953, secret. Macmillan hinted that a future European political and defence community could be under the hegemony of Germany and such a perspective was feared by the British politician.
- 34 Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign*, pp. 176–9.
- 35 On Britain's position at the Bermuda conference, see J.W.Young, 'Churchill, the Russians and the Western Alliance: The Three-Power Conference at Bermuda, December 1953', *English Historical Review*, 101 (1986), 889–912.

- 36 On Britain's position at the Berlin conference, see, for example, Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign*, pp. 238–47.
- 37 On the relations between France and the US in this period, see the interesting evaluations in J.De Folin, *Indochine 1940–1955: La fin d'un rêve*, Paris: Perrin, 1993, pp. 233–72; see also Wall, *L'influence américaine*, pp. 328–81.
- 38 Gilbert, *Never Despair*, pp. 972–4; Dutton, *Anthony Eden*, pp. 343–4; Young, *Winston Churchill's Last Campaign*, pp. 260–5.
- 39 Inder Singh, *The Limits of British Influence*, pp. 157–76.
- 40 On Mendès France's attitude toward Britain, see M.Vaïsse, 'La Grande Bretagne, une partenaire privilégiée?', in F.Bédarida and J.-P.Rioux (eds), *Pierre Mendès France et le mendesisme*, Paris: Fayard, 1985, pp. 279–86; see also E.du Réau, 'Pierre Mendès France, la creation de l'Union européenne occidentale (UEO) et son devenir', in R. Girault (ed.), *Pierre Mendès France et le role de la France dans le monde*, Grenoble: PUG, 1991, pp. 25–38.
- 41 S.Dockrill, 'Britain and the Settlement of the West German Rearmament Question in 1954', in M.Dockrill and J.W.Young (eds), *British Foreign Policy 1945–56*, London: Macmillan, 1989, pp. 149–72; A.Deighton, 'Britain and the Creation of Western European Union 1954', in M.Dumoulin (ed.), *La Communauté Européenne de Défense: Leçons pour demain?*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000, pp. 283–308.
- 42 Dutton, *Anthony Eden*, p. 352; the author regards 1954 as Eden's 'annus mirabilis'.
- 43 G.-H.Soutou, 'Pierre Mendès France et l'URSS 1954–1955', in Girault (ed.), *Pierre Mendès France*, pp. 177–206; A.Varsori, 'Alle origini della prima distensione: la Francia di Pierre Mendès France e la ripresa del dialogo con Mosca', *Storia delle relazioni internazionali*, 8, 1–2 (1992), 63–97.
- 44 On the Austrian question, see G.Bischof, *Austria in the First Cold War, 1944–55: The Leverage of the Weak*, London: Macmillan, 1999.
- 45 For an overall view of the Eden Government's experience, see R.Lamb, *The Failure of the Eden Government*, London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1987.
- 46 At any rate Britain's early views about Khrushchev were pessimistic, especially that of the British Ambassador, who appeared worried about such a development; see PRO, FO 371, NS 107/29, despatch No. 23, Sir W.Hayter (Moscow) to A.Eden (FO), 10 February 1955, confidential.
- 47 For an overall view of the Geneva summit conference, see G.Bischof and S.Dockrill (eds), *Cold War Respite: The Geneva Summit of 1955*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000.
- 48 See A.Varsori, 'British Policy Aims at Geneva', and S.Dockrill, 'The Eden Plan and European Security', in Bischof and Dockrill (eds), *Cold War Respite*, pp. 75–96, 161–89.
- 49 S.Dockrill, 'The Eden Plan'.
- 50 The weakness of the Soviet economy was stressed by Adenauer, see PRO, PREM 11/893, tel. No. 76, Sir C.Steel (NATO-Paris) to FO, 8 May 1955, confidential. On Hayter's cautiousness, see, for example, his early reaction to the Soviet proposal for a visit to Moscow by the West German Chancellor, PRO, PREM 11/894, tel. No. 555, Sir W.Hayter (Moscow) to FO, 8 June 1955, priority confidential.
- 51 V.M.Zubok, 'Soviet Policy Aims at the Geneva Conference, 1955', in Bischof and Dockrill (eds), *Cold War Respite*, pp. 55–74. For a wider view of Khrushchev's positions in the mid-1950s, see V.Zubok and C.Pleshakov, *Inside the Kremlin's Cold War: From Stalin to Khrushchev*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press,