

**March 11, 1953**  
**Memorandum of Discussion at the 136th Meeting of  
the National Security Council**

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**Summary:**

The US National Security Council discusses the effect that Stalin's death had on Soviet policy and on Communist Parties outside of the USSR, as well as the opportunity it provided the US to use Stalin's death in a psychological strategy to influence the Soviets. The Council also discusses the possibility of negotiations for a settlement with the Soviets in Korea.

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**Contents:**

Transcript - English

## TOP SECRET EYES ONLY

Present at the 136th meeting of the Council were the President of the United States, presiding; the Vice President of the United States; the Secretary of State; the Secretary of Defense; and the Director for Mutual Security. Also present were the Secretary of the Treasury; the Director, Bureau of the Budget; the Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission (for Item 1 only); General [J. Lawton] Collins for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director of Central Intelligence; the Administrative Assistant to the President for National Security Matters; the Special Assistant to the President for Cold War Operations; the Military Liaison Officer; the Executive Secretary, NSC; and the Deputy Executive Secretary, NSC.

There follows a general account of the main positions taken and the chief points made at this meeting.

[Here follows discussion of agenda item 1, "The Development of Practical Nuclear Power".]

## 2. The Effect of Stalin's Death (NSC Action No. 728; 5E-394)

The Director of Central Intelligence led off discussion of this item with an oral summary of the special estimate (SE-39) on the subject prepared in response to the Council's request at the previous meeting. In commenting on the governmental changes in Russia which would follow upon Stalin's death, Mr. Dulles noted its striking similarity to the close-knit organization for defense set up by Stalin during the second World War. The great question confronting intelligence officers was to determine whether this new set-up in Russia constituted personal dictatorship by Malenkov, or some sort of committee control. Mr. Dulles thought the latter the more likely. Certainly, he went on to say, the new regime in the Soviet Union was less sure of itself than its predecessor. It may not be more adventurous than the Stalin regime, but it may also prove less successful in handling itself and the outside world.

Mr. Dulles then discussed first the effect of Stalin's death on the Communist Parties outside the USSR. The fringe membership of these Parties, he believed, might now be more vulnerable, but the hard core membership would be but slightly affected. It was unlikely that Kremlin control of the satellites would be seriously threatened, and he anticipated no significant change in the hostility of Yugoslavia toward the Kremlin. Similarly, no immediate change was to be anticipated in Russia's relations with Communist China, though Moscow would have to deal with Mao with the utmost care and tact.

Thereafter, Mr. Dulles summarized the reactions of the foreign offices of the free world toward Stalin's death, noting that in most instances these countries favored a policy of proceeding with great caution.

At the conclusion of Mr. Dulles' estimate, the President reiterated a belief which he had stated earlier to the Council, that Stalin had never actually been undisputed ruler of the Soviet Union. Contrary to the views of many of our intelligence agencies, the President persisted in believing that the Government of the Soviet Union had always been something of a committee government. From personal experience the President believed that had Stalin, at the end of the war, been able to do what he wanted with his colleagues in the Kremlin, Russia would have sought more peaceful and normal relations with the rest of the world. The fact that the Soviet Union instead chose cold war seemed to the President an indication that, in some degree at least, Stalin had had to come to terms with other members of the Kremlin ruling circle.

Thereupon, Mr. Jackson undertook to explain to the Council the manner in which he

had carried out its directive of last week regarding the plan for psychological exploitation of Stalin's death, to be prepared by himself with the assistance of the Psychological Strategy Board and its staff. The plan which had been drawn up, he said, was based firmly on approved NSC policy recommendations beginning with NSC 20/4. It was likewise based on the assumption that the United States Government would exploit Stalin's death to the limit of psychological usefulness, on the assumption that the United States required a unified plan to accomplish its objectives, and finally, on the assumption that Stalin's death had provided the United States Government with its first significant and normal opportunity to seize the initiative. It seemed to Mr. Jackson that the use of the words "disarray," "panic," and "lack of unity," in Malenkov's recent speeches, was very significant. The use of such terms either constituted a serious boner by the new Russian regime, or else it indicated genuine concern over the peaceful transition to the new authority. Furthermore, Mr. Jackson stated that the draft plan was to be considered both as a dramatic psychological move and also as a serious policy proposal not to be dismissed as merely a propaganda effort. The point of departure in the plan was an address by the President to be made as early as possible and not later, he hoped, than the first of next week. The draft of such a Presidential address had been prepared. It contained no mere pious platitudes, but a real bite. Notably, it had the President call for a Foreign Ministers Conference of the Big Four, in the course of which the United States would set forth its desire to negotiate all the major outstanding issues between the free world and the Soviet bloc, including the unification of Germany and disarmament. However, said Mr. Jackson, everything in the plan was to flow from the initial move, the President's address. From the moment of delivery of that speech all the arms of the United States Government, all the Embassies and missions abroad, all the other facets of American power and influence, were to be linked closely together in the pursuit of the objective. The follow-up would have to be swift, sure, and coordinated.

Mr. Jackson then noted that of course objections to his plan had been raised in the course of putting it together. Most of the objections centered in the Department of State. Mr. Jackson proposed to discuss these objections, but Secretary Dulles interposed to say that perhaps this task had best be done by him. Mr. Jackson readily agreed, but said he did wish to point out that we are, as he put it, ready to shoot. He was convinced that this was the greatest opportunity presented to the United States in many years to seize the initiative, and that that initiative ought to be seized even if this Government had to proceed unilaterally. The plan which he drafted, said Mr. Jackson, was in line with the views that President Eisenhower had set forth in the course of his campaign, as well as the views during the same period enunciated by Secretary Dulles. There was nothing in it new and strange and nothing which, it seemed to him, would not fit into the framework of this Administration's thinking on psychological strategy.

Secretary Dulles began his statement by observing that he personally did not endorse all the objections to Mr. Jackson's plan which had been raised in the State Department. He agreed, for example, that Stalin's death did afford the United States an opportunity to effect changes in the Communist world which might well reduce the threat which the Soviet world presented to the free world. As he saw it, the present menace of the USSR consisted in the complete control of a vast area by a handful of men who could use their power with impunity. This terrible concentration of power had largely been created, according to Secretary Dulles, by a process in which the normal urges of nationalism in the satellite states had been channeled and transformed into virtual worship of Stalin as a demi-god. As a result of this process, the Communist leaders in the satellite countries had been able to hand over to Stalin control of their countries without conscious loss of the national prestige. All this was possible while Stalin lived; but the Communist leaders in the satellites would experience far greater difficulty today in subordinating the impulse of nationalism in their respective countries to the relatively unknown individual who had taken Stalin's place. Therefore, what we must do, continued the Secretary, was to play up this nationalism and discontent for all it was worth, to seize every opportunity by this

device to break down the monolithic Soviet control over the satellite states.

We have had plenty of experience ourselves as to the difficulties of keeping a coalition together, said Secretary Dulles. It may be that the Soviets will soon experience similar or worse difficulties in their own coalition. Thus nationalism is the great theme to be developed as the means of breaking down the Stalinist structure. But Secretary Dulles warned that we have a problem of our own. We too have a coalition to manage. In our attempt to destroy the unity of the Soviet orbit we must not jeopardize the unity of our own coalition. We must draw together and not fall apart at this moment in history, and it seemed especially doubtful to the Secretary of State as to whether this was the appropriate moment to carry the offensive direct to the Soviet Union. The Soviet was now involved in a family funeral, and it might be best to wait until the corpse was buried and the mourners gone off to their homes to read the will, before we begin our campaign to create discord in the family. If we moved precipitately we might very well enhance Soviet family loyalty and disrupt the free world's.

Furthermore, Secretary Dulles stated his belief that another consideration should be uppermost in our minds at this time. This was a moment in history when the people of the United States and of the free world generally feel that some great new effort should be made to stake out a new course. We mustn't let this opportunity pass or let our people down. We certainly cannot be totally negative in our reactions to what had occurred in Russia, but whatever we do decide to do must be done carefully and with equal consideration as to its effect on the USSR and on the free world. Accordingly, with regard to Mr. Jackson's specific proposal of a meeting of the Foreign Ministers, Secretary Dulles could not but feel that such a meeting would have quite disastrous effects on our ties with our allies unless we obtained their prior consent to the agenda for such a meeting. They would believe our leadership erratic, venturesome, and arbitrary. Secretary Dulles said he felt especially concerned at the proposal in Mr. Jackson's plan, to place discussion of German unity on the agenda for such a Foreign Ministers meeting. Discussion of German unity in such a forum at this time would ruin every prospect of ratification of the European Defense Community by the parliamentarians of the several states. It would undermine the positions of Chancellor [Konrad] Adenauer and of Prime Ministers [Rene] Mayer and [Italian Prime Minister Alcide] de Gasperi who had actually staked their futures on the ratification of the EDC treaties.

In addition to this, if we call the new Soviet regime to take part in a Foreign Ministers Conference, history proved that the Soviets would simply dig up all their old plans for Foreign Ministers meetings, would resort to all their devices for delay and obstruction. Nothing positive would be achieved, and meanwhile the neutralists, and all those who were hostile to a more united Europe, would take new heart. Secretary Dulles said that he was in no position to guarantee that the great EDC plan would materialize, whatever we did, but he was sure that the proposal to discuss German unity with the Soviets in a Foreign Ministers Conference was tantamount to inviting the fall of the French, German and Italian Governments, and possibly even rendering Mr. Eden's position in the British Government untenable. Thus he felt compelled to advise against this part of Mr. Jackson's plan.

Turning now, Secretary Dulles said, to something positive and constructive, he suggested that the President's speech should substitute, for the proposal of a Foreign Ministers Conference, a call for the end of hostilities in Asia generally, and in Korea and Indo-China specifically, under appropriate safeguards. If the new Soviet regime could be persuaded to agree to something like this, the path would be open to further negotiations on other matters. Such an approach seemed to the Secretary of State better than to begin from the European end. But in any case enough should be done now to satisfy American opinion that no attempt to cause the Soviet to change its spots had been let unexplored.

When the Secretary of State had concluded his opening remarks, the President asked him in what form he would present his ideas to the world.

Secretary Dulles replied that he agreed that the opening gun should be a speech by the President. Mr. Jackson added that this could be done over television, the address to be directed, on the one hand, to the peoples of the Soviet Union and, on the other, to the peoples of the United States and the free world.

The President inquired how it would be possible, in view of the jamming, to get any such message through to the peoples of the Soviet Union.

Mr. Jackson replied that while there might indeed be jamming of any broadcast to the peoples of the Soviet Union, the President's message would certainly get through to the officials of the Soviet Government and would be widely heard in the satellite states.

The President then informed the Council that he had received some days ago, and prior to the death of Stalin, a suggestion for a speech from Mr. Sam Lubell, for whose opinions the President had considerable respect. Lubell had written the President of his belief that in our efforts to influence the Soviets as well as the people of the free world, we should give up any more appeals with regard to specific issues, such as Korea, and concentrate instead on our determination to raise the general standard of living throughout the world; to suggest, for instance, that no more than 10% of the resources of the different countries of the world should be devoted to armaments, and all the rest to the provision of food, shelter, and consumers goods. The President noted that the peoples of the Soviet Union had for years now been promised, after the completion of each successive Five-Year Plan, that their own personal needs and aspirations would be considered by their government. They had been disappointed in each case. Accordingly, what we should now do is propose that the standard of living throughout the world be raised at once, not at some indefinite time in the future. Such an appeal as this might really work. On the other hand, the President said, he could not but share Secretary Dulles' anxiety about the wisdom of a four-power meeting. We all know that the Soviets would stall indefinitely on the agenda for such a meeting. We do need something dramatic to rally the peoples of the world around some idea, some hope, of a better future. A four-power conference would not do it, but the President might say that he would be ready and willing to meet with anyone anywhere from the Soviet Union provided the basis for the meeting was honest and practical.

Secretary Dulles expressed great interest in this idea of the President's, and said that it seemed to him to be supported by the enormous difficulty experienced by the Soviet Union in keeping their satellites from participation in the Marshall Plan.

Certainly, the President replied, the economic incentive would have terrific attraction in Russia if it could be got over to the ordinary people.

Mr. Jackson interrupted to say that there seemed to him another side to the position that Secretary Dulles had taken. It certainly seemed conceivable to Mr. Jackson that one of the main reasons for the cool attitude of many Europeans to our goal for unity in Europe stemmed from real doubts about the long-range commitment of the United States to support European unity and defense. If the full weight and majesty of American statesmanship and diplomacy could be rallied behind the objective of getting the EDC treaties signed, Mr. Jackson was convinced there would be no further worries about the overthrow of the present regimes in Western Europe. Indeed, nothing would be more effective in building them up. This, said Mr. Jackson, seemed to him to be the great opportunity presented to a great Secretary of State.

The President replied with a question as to whether Mr. Jackson assumed that such pressure has not already been brought to bear by our diplomats. It most certainly had been, in the President's own experience. The real difficulty and the real explanation of

the instability of these Western European governments came from the fact that they were afraid of their own peoples. Thus European unity had become a political issue. The governments were all in favor of it, but they were afraid of their peoples.

To this statement Secretary Dulles added again his view that if an attempt were made to create German unity by some other vehicle than the EDC, then certainly the EDC would be finished.

The President again said that emphasis in the current psychological plan, and notably in his speech, must be on the simple theme of a higher living standard for all the world, and he suggested that Mr. Jackson and his colleagues take a look at this and all the other ideas which had been advanced, and come up with a new plan for the steps that we should take. The focus, the President said, should be on the common man's yearning for food, shelter, and a decent standard of living. This was a universal desire and we should respond to it.

Mr. Stassen stated that plainly the country's greatest asset at this juncture was the leadership of President Eisenhower, and that every effort should be made to project the President's leadership and personality throughout the rest of the world. In addition to emphasizing the standard of living as the goal sought by the President, Mr. Jackson's plan should also stress the moral values represented in the President.

The President seemed somewhat skeptical of this latter point, saying that we had stressed our moral values consistently in the past. He preferred, therefore, that the emphasis be placed on raising material standards for the common people throughout the world. This, he thought, might even result in a settlement in Korea.

Mr. Stassen then inquired what might be the effect if the President in his speech were to propose an immediate and complete cease-fire in Korea.

The President commented that the Russians had already made such a proposal.

Secretary Dulles pointed out the implication represented by the prisoner-of-war problem, and General Collins added to this by warning that if we called for a cease-fire we would have to stop the bombing of Communist communications and military targets. The Communists would thus be able to pile up supplies, and we should quickly find ourselves very vulnerable to attack.

Secretary [of Defense] Wilson expressed complete agreement with General Collins. Thereafter the Council discussed for some time the question of how and when, and in what forum, the President should make his address. No firm conclusions were reached on any of these points, although the President stated his own belief that the question of when and how his speech was to be delivered was almost as important as its content.

The National Security Council:

- a. Noted an intelligence estimate on the subject presented orally by the Director of Central Intelligence, based on a special estimate (SE-39) circulated at the meeting.
- b. Noted and discussed "A Proposed Plan for a Psychological Warfare Offensive," presented orally by the Special Assistant to the President for Cold War Operations, based on a written report prepared with the assistance of the Psychological Strategy Board and its staff.
- c. Noted the views of the Secretary of State on the policy implications of Stalin's death, and the Secretary's reactions to the proposed psychological plan.
- d. Agreed:

(1) That Stalin's death presents an opportunity for the assertion of world leadership by President Eisenhower in the interests of security, peace, and a higher standard of living for all peoples.

(2) That the Special Assistant to the President for Cold War Operations should immediately draft an address by the President in the light of the discussion at the meeting, for early delivery at a time and place to be determined.

(3) That there should be a coordinated and sustained emphasis and follow-up on this address by all appropriate departments and agencies, both at home and abroad.

Note: The action in d-(2) above subsequently referred to the Special Assistant to the President for Cold War Operations for implementation. The action in d-(3) above subsequently referred to the Psychological Strategy Board for implementation.

[Here follows discussion of agenda items 3-5, concerning developments in Iran, United States objectives with respect to Latin America, and the NSC status of projects.]

[...]

S. Everett Gleason