

## Letter from Maurice Couve de Murville to Antoine Pinay (Washington, 27 May 1955)

**Caption:** On 27 May 1955, Maurice Couve de Murville, French Ambassador to the United States, informs the French Foreign Minister, Antoine Pinay, of the US reactions to the changes taking place in Soviet foreign policy.

**Source:** Ministère des Affaires étrangères; Commission de publication des DDF (sous la dir.). Documents diplomatiques français. Volume I: 1955, 1er janvier-30 juin. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1987. 849 p. p. 696-697.

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The State Department has tried to identify the reasons that led to the spectacular tactical change in Moscow's foreign policy.

American experts take the view that, since the death of Stalin, the Soviet leadership reappraised the world situation and has realised that Russia's intransigent and threatening policy has served only to strengthen unity amongst the Western powers. This reappraisal began before the Paris Agreements were ratified. For the Soviet leadership, the vote in the French Parliament is just one of the elements backing up their decision to change tactics.

The first sign of this change was the Russian Government's new attitude towards Austria, although American experts believe that the Russians never intended to stay there. Russian occupation of that country was merely a trump card that the Soviet Government was holding back so as to play it when the time was ripe. It considers that the time has now come to begin its policy of neutralising central Europe.

The Americans are also convinced that a fundamental element in the reassessment of Soviet policy was the belief that, for a number of years to come, the USSR would continue to be threatened by the hydrogen bomb and that, in the event of a war, not only would Russia's industrial progress be wiped out but so might Communism itself be. This argument is particularly significant for an analysis of relations between the USSR and China.

The Soviet leadership seemed to consider that the Chinese Government, through its rash policies, increasingly independent of Moscow, might well suck them into a conflict that could not be contained.

The Soviet Union's economic problems would also have carried considerable weight in the devising of the new Soviet policy. These are, doubtless, not new problems and, strictly speaking, there is no economic crisis in the USSR. However, the new leadership has become aware of the scale of existing economic problems, particularly in agriculture. Malenkov learned to his cost that sacrifices could not be imposed on the Russian population indefinitely and that the desire for a higher living standard had to be satisfied, particularly amongst the regime's upstart bureaucrats.

Whatever the reasons that led the Soviet leadership to change its attitude, the State Department remains convinced that this is only a tactical change. Moscow's aims continue to be to prevent German rearmament and secure the withdrawal of American troops from Europe. Rather than pursuing these aims with threats, the Soviet leadership is now using the neutralisation approach. Neutralisation, in their mind, should be used only towards countries outside the Soviet orbit, and most American experts remain convinced that the Soviet Government will not abandon East Germany. The evacuation of the Soviet zone in Austria does not, in their opinion, constitute a precedent, because Austria had never been a satellite.