

April 15, 1954

The Question of a Conference of the Five Great Powers with the Participation of the PRC

Citation:

"The Question of a Conference of the Five Great Powers with the Participation of the PRC", April 15, 1954, Wilson Center Digital Archive, AVPRF F. 0100 Op. 47 Papka 389 D. 107 pp.8-20. Translated for NKIDP by Gary Goldberg.
<https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/114941>

Summary:

At a conference of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, US, Britain and France, the USSR proposes a conference including the PRC, but the others oppose China's participation.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from Leon Levy Foundation

Original Language:

Russian

Contents:

Translation - English

Secret

15 April 1954

The Question of a Conference of the Five Great Powers with the Participation of the PRC

(memorandum)

[Translator's note: there are some seemingly random quotation marks in the text which do not in fact seem to contain complete quotations. They have been entered where they appear in the text]

At the conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the USSR, US, Britain, and France which opened in Berlin on 25 January the Soviet delegation proposed to discuss the following issues:

- 1 Measures to reduce tension in international relations and the convening of a conference of the ministers of foreign affairs of France, Britain, the US, the Soviet Union, and the People's Republic of China.
- 2) The German question and the task of ensuring European security.
- 3) An Austrian State Treaty.

Dulles, Eden, and Bidault tried in every way to avoid consideration of the first issue proposed by the Soviet delegation at the conference, insisting that the work of the Berlin Conference be limited to an examination of only the German and Austrian issues. As a result of a two-day discussion of the issue of the conference's agenda the agenda proposed by the Soviet delegation was nevertheless adopted by the Berlin conference although Dulles, Eden, and Bidault made reservations at the time in the sense that their acceptance of the agenda did not signify their agreement with the wording of the points contained in this agenda, especially the subject which was being inserted in this wording by the Soviet delegation.

Insisting on a discussion of this issue the Soviet delegation explained its proposal by the fact that the convening of a conference of the ministers of foreign affairs of the five powers with the participation of the PRC is a long-standing issue inasmuch as in present conditions only a combination of the efforts of all the great powers together with the efforts of other countries can ensure a reduction in tension in the international situation and the achievement of corresponding agreements on urgent international problems.

It was pointed out at the time that the UN Security Council is charged with "the main responsibility for maintaining international peace and security" and that according to the UN Charter all important decisions of the Security Council to maintain international peace should be adopted with the unanimous consent of the five powers - France, Britain, the US, the USSR, and China.

The Soviet delegation noted that at the present time these very important provisions of the UN Charter cannot be fulfilled for one reason, that the People's Republic of China, the only legal representative of the Chinese people, is not represented in the UN and that such a situation was created primarily as a result of the fact that the restoration of the legal rights of the PRC is being resisted by one of the countries, namely the United States of America. However the abnormality and inadmissibility of this is so obvious that it would be wrong to tolerate the present situation.

The Soviet delegation also pointed to the need to recognize the urgency of taking such measures as a considerable reduction of all weapons, especially the weapons of the great powers, and the need to make decisions directed at prohibiting atomic, hydrogen, and other kinds of weapons of mass destruction, the establishment of effective international monitoring of this prohibition, and as the first step toward this, to recognize the need for governments to renounce the use of atomic weapons.

The Soviet delegation also noted that the settlement of issues regarding the People's Republic of China, including the restoration of its legal rights in the SON [Translator's note: SIC, probably a typo for "OON", the UN], has special importance. A forward movement in this regard would have great importance for the settlement of important international political and economic problems, including a resolution of the Korean issue".

The Soviet delegation directed attention to the fact that 25 large and small countries with a [total] population of about one billion people have established diplomatic relations with the PRC. Not one independent country remains in Asia which has not established political relations with the PRC or at least was not intending to establish political or economic relations with the PRC". Many European countries including countries which belong to the Atlantic Pact have recognized it necessary to establish diplomatic relations with the new China.

Only in North and South America can there not be found a single country which has yet decided to establish normal relations with people's democratic China. But what this indicates is understood without further explanation.

The Soviet delegation declared at this point that the Soviet government proceeds from the point of view that such a situation cannot continue for long. The convening of a conference of the five powers with the participation of the PRC would in many respects promote an easing and an improvement of the entire international situation.

Dulles, who spoke first, objected to the proposal of the Soviet delegation, repeated the usual insinuations against the PRC in connection with the war in Korea, calling China "an aggressor". He cited figures of American losses in Korea, 150,000 killed and wounded, when he was doing this.

Dulles declared that the US would not agree to participate in a conference of the five with the participation of the PRC to discuss issues of international peace. He added that the US is not refusing to deal with the new "regime" when "the circumstances require this", referring at this point to the armistice in Korea and to the talks in Panmunjeom to convene a political conference on Korea. Continuing objections to the convening of a conference of the five powers Dulles tried to depict the matter as if such a conference would mean that the five great powers intend to command other countries".

Replying to the attacks of Dulles and his references to the UN resolution in which the PRC was declared an "aggressor", the Soviet delegation stated that the government of the USSR holds to its point of view which was stated by its delegation to the UN. This resolution does the UN no honor, and to the contrary this mistaken resolution depreciated the authority of the UN.

The Soviet delegation also directed attention to the fact that the war in Korea ended thanks to the PRC and the ShchTsR [SIC, possible a typo for the USSR], that an end was put to the war in Korea after action [vystuplenie] by Zhou Enlai and Kim Il Sung at the end of March 1953 and the American, British, Chinese and Korean soldiers

were able to return home. The Soviet delegation pointed to the need to take this fact into consideration when talking about the PRC and its role in the issue of strengthening peace.

Speaking on 27 January Dulles again declared that the US rejects the idea of convening a conference of the five powers. At this point he referred to the fact that back in 1945 in San Francisco the UN "rejected the principle of the world dominance of the five powers" and he insisted that the Berlin conference of the four powers consider only the German and Austrian questions. He also declared that the convening of a political conference on Korea with the participation of all five powers was called for by the armistice agreement in order to settle the political issues in Korea. Not denying the need to examine several other issues" Dulles however tried to depict the matter such that they could be discussed either at the UN or via ordinary diplomatic channels.

Dulles proposed that the conference "not make any decision about the first point of the agenda and move to the second and third points", that is, to the German and Austrian questions".

Unlike Dulles, Bidault declared that he recognizes "the special responsibility" of the five powers according to the UN Charter; however, here he repeated Dulles' point that these powers "do not have special privileges to rule the world". Regarding the issue of the participation of China in a conference of the five, Bidault declared that it is possible to have relations or hold talks between countries with different political systems. However, immediately afterwards he opposed a conference of the five with the participation of the PRC at the present time; Bidault tried to explain his objections by the fact that the PRC government was allegedly "helping continue the war in Indochina and that therefore "the French government will not consider a proposal to convene a conference of the five as long as the facts remain as they are". If the facts change, he added, then the French government would welcome the situation "in the new light of the facts".

Repeating that France has never rejected "contact in relations" and stressing that there are two problems in Asia - first, Korea, and second, Southeast Asia - he declared that there is the possibility of solving the first problem through a political conference, renewing the talks in Panmunjom which were broken off. As regards Indochina then in his opinion the simplest method would be a political conference which would not only deal with the Korean issue but also the issue of Indochina. Bidault added here that he was not at all refusing to consider other possible means and referred to the fact that diplomatic means had not yet been used for this to settle such issues.

Eden's position came down to repeating the point about the need "to begin with the problem of Germany and Austria". Following Dulles, Eden referred to the fact that according to the UN Charter the right to solve problems of peace is not just given to the five powers. He stressed that the existing problems in Asia, and Korea and Indochina in particular, are "the main sources of tension" and causing everyone much concern. He repeated the unbeaten [SIC, nebityy; possibly the author meant izbityy, trite] American point about "the lack of evidence" that the PRC government desires cooperation in an attempt to settle the Korean and Indochina questions and other Asian problems.

In connection with the statement of the Soviet delegation that one of the issues which ought to be examined at a conference of the five is the issue of arms reduction and a halt to the arms race Eden stated that in his opinion it would be best for this issue to be examined within the framework of the UN.

Having shown the groundlessness of the objections and reservations of the representatives of the three powers to the proposal to convene a conference of the

five, the Soviet delegation noted that both Dulles and Eden and especially Bidault had entertained in their statements the possibility of convening a conference of the five powers with one or another restrictions and conditions, although in different form. The Soviet delegation again stressed the need in this matter to convene a conference of the five powers taking the statements of Dulles, Bidault, and Eden into consideration, and also taking into consideration that such a conference cannot just be limited to Asian issues but there are grounds to also deal with other international problems which have especially great importance for international peace.

In the course of further discussion in their statements on 28 January Dulles, Bidault, and Eden tried to challenge the argument cited by the Soviet delegation in favor of convening a conference of the five powers. In doing so Dulles did not stop at a direct distortion of the facts, declaring that the Soviet delegation was allegedly proposing transferring all of the most important functions of the United Nations to the conference of the five and "replacing this organization with a Council of the Five Great Powers". He again made malicious attacks with regard to the PRC and Cde. Zhou Enlai personally. Without offering any proposal about the issue under discussion Dulles proposed moving to consideration of the German and Austrian issues.

Bidault, continuing to express his "doubts" about the advisability of convening a conference of the five, accused the PRC of "aggression in Indochina". Objecting to the discussion of arms reduction issues at a conference of the five Bidault again tried to explain this by the fact that the UN deals with these issues. He declared that the examination of the issue of disarmament is impossible "without halting military operations everywhere" and that therefore, he said, in the opinion of the French government the participation of China in an examination of the issue at a conference of the five about the development of international trade is undesirable in current conditions and circumstances. Bidault tried to explain the cessation of trade with China by the fact that the French cannot deliver goods to China which the Chinese might use against the French in Indochina and that "if China changes its position then France will reexamine its attitude toward the issue of trade with China". Bidault stated that the French government is ready to use any opportunity to restore peace in Indochina by halting military operations under conditions acceptable to all the interested parties. Trying to sum up the discussions on the first issue, Bidault stated that in spite of the distance [between] the positions of the participants of the conference a rapprochement of the points of view on several issues cannot be considered impossible.

Eden again continued to speak against convening a conference of the five powers, referring to the "impracticability" of convening a conference with a broad agenda. Advocating the consideration of "specific and practical problems" in both in Asia and Europe which affect the great powers he tried to explain his objections to the convening of a conference of the five powers by the fact that issues of international importance are of interest to many countries in view of which they cannot be examined at a conference with a limited number of participants. Eden spoke in favor of the need to settle such political problems in Asia as Korea and Indochina and also for a search for methods for the practical solution of these problems. He proposed deferring the first question of the agenda for the time being and moving to the German and Austrian issues, explaining this by the need to have time for further "deliberation and an exchange of opinions" in order to renew the discussion of the issue of convening a conference of the five powers later.

Responding to Dulles, Bidault, and Eden the Soviet delegation showed the groundlessness of Dulles' assertion that we were supposedly proposing to undermine the UN by a council of five and declared that the Soviet Union is not in favor of changing the UN Charter but putting it into practice. As justification of its proposal to convene a conference of the five powers the Soviet delegation also referred to the fact that at the 3rd Session in 1948 and at the 5th Session in 1950 the General Assembly made a special appeal to the great powers to meet and discuss either

collectively or through some other procedure all issues which might threaten international peace and interfere with the work of the UN in order to resolve differences and achieve agreement, and also directed attention to the fact that the Western powers often hold conferences of the three ministers of foreign affairs without limiting the agenda of such conferences.

The Soviet delegation contrasted the proposal offered by the US, Britain, and France in May 1952 in the Disarmament Commission about establishing agreed limits for the level of the armed forces for the five great powers, including the PRC, with the point of Dulles, Bidault, and Eden about the issue of arms reduction being a UN matter, thereby stressing the recognition by the three powers of the special role of the great powers in this issue. The Soviet delegation also directed attention to the fact that in this proposal of the US, Britain, and France the establishment of limits on the strength of the armed forces for all other countries was conditioned on the establishment of agreed limits for the five powers.

Replying to Dulles' attacks on the PRC the Soviet delegation declared that if the Chinese representative had been present at this conference he would have given a fitting response to Dulles' statement and that, in view of this, such a statement made in the absence of those against whom it was directed is neither more justifiable nor more convincing. The Soviet delegation also stated that the accusations advanced against the PRC by Dulles have no basis inasmuch as he is obviously receiving information about the PRCV from Nationalist Chinese sources.

The Soviet delegation also stated that the PRC is not an aggressor, as Dulles and Bidault are trying to establish, but a victim of aggression and that there is no need to shift the blame for their own blunders, shortcomings, mistakes, and incorrect acts onto others. It was stressed at this point that it is the PRC that is in such a position where it has someone to accuse and has someone against whom to take offense inasmuch as an entire series of injustices have been committed with respect to China by other countries. This was contrasted with the friendly relations between the Soviet Union and the PRC on the basis of equality and the recognition of mutual rights.

The Soviet delegation said that the initial conclusions about the issue being discussed might be worded in terms that a conference of the five is not being rejected although the purposes of such a conference have still not been agreed upon.

Objecting to this conclusion, Dulles stated that "the US does not agree with the proposal to convene a conference of the five powers with the participation of Communist China, although it does not object to talks with China about Korea inasmuch as this is not a conference of the five powers.

Bidault, speaking in favor of "the principle of talks" to settle unresolved issues in Asia, declared that the issue of the nature of such talks, the participants of the talks, and the issues under consideration require further discussion. At this point he again referred to the need "to receive guarantees and evidence of a halt in military operations before beginning talks".

The Soviet delegation, referring to the fact that the participants of the conference evidently have a desire to continue the search for agreement, proposed creating a Committee which would continue the study of the issue of convening a conference of the five with the expectation that the four ministers would again turn to the discussion of this issue on receipt of a report from the committee. However, Dulles and then Bidault and Eden spoke in favor of them not wanting to make a decision about a committee but were ready for the ministers to meet alone [v uzkom sostave uchastnikov] in the next few days and discuss issues relating to the first point of the agenda. The Soviet delegation reserved the right during such a meeting to again raise the issue of the creation of the aforementioned committee.

At the same time the Soviet delegation submitted a proposal about convening a World Conference on General Arms Reductions (the text of this proposal was communicated to the PRC government beforehand).

At the 29 January meeting Dulles tried to avoid discussion of the Soviet proposal about convening a conference on general arms reductions and proposed moving to discussion of the German question.

In reply to this the Soviet delegation directed the attention of the participants of the conference to the seriousness of the issue of arms reductions and that it would not be understood if the delegations of the three countries did not define their position toward the Soviet proposal.

Dulles tried to refer to the fact that the issue of convening such a conference has already been examined at the UN and insisted that the conference move to consideration of "serious questions, the German and Austrian".

However, Bidault submitted his own "draft resolution about convening a general conference on disarmament" for the consideration of the conference. The proposals which the US, Britain, and France had previously submitted at the General Assembly session and in the UN Disarmament Commission formed the basis of this draft. These proposals include the conclusion of "an agreement about a program of coordinated disarmament", "guarantees and international monitoring, allowing only weapons necessary for the individual and collective security of countries", etc. The draft also contains a demand to halt all military operations wherever they are and also a condemnation of aid to and support of aggression "wherever such aid has occurred". The draft proposes that the USSR, US, Britain, and France come to agreement in the Disarmament Commission about the basic principles of disarmament which "would provide an opportunity to convene a general conference on disarmament in accordance with the General Assembly resolution of 11 January 1952 in conditions favorable to success".

Contrasting his draft to the proposal of the Soviet delegation about convening a world conference on arms reduction Bidault proposed that the draft he had submitted be considered together with the issue of convening a conference of the five and other related issues which would be considered in the next few days by the four ministers at a special, more private [s bolee uzkim sostavom uchastnikov] meeting.

Eden tried to explain his objections to the adoption of the proposal of the Soviet delegation by the fact that "progress in disarmament" needs to be conditioned first on a relaxation of international tension and the restoration of international trust". Supporting Bidault's proposal about moving the French draft to the consideration of a private meeting, Eden insisted on moving to the consideration of the German and Austrian issues.

The Soviet delegation, for its part, submitted a proposal to move both proposals, the Soviet and the French, to the consideration of a private meeting.

This proposal was adopted.

The discussion of the Soviet proposal which occurred about a reduction of tension in international relations and about convening a conference of the five powers showed that the Western powers refuse to agree with the Soviet proposal about a conference of the five but at the same time they consider it politically and tactically disadvantageous for them to expressly reject this proposal".