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EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

1. Four-Power Talks

1955 was the year of the great summer thaw. The Four Powers¹ held two top-level meetings at Geneva. Although they discussed the more general question of disarmament, they were primarily concerned with outstanding European problems between East and West, and above all with Germany. They failed, in the Foreign Ministers' Meeting, to translate the general *détente* achieved at the Summit Meeting into any concrete agreements. There remained of the "spirit of Geneva", however, the implied assumption on both sides that a nuclear war was unthinkable because it would mean universal destruction.

Over the year, there has been a small net gain in confidence, though there was no evidence of a basic reconciliation. Indeed, as the year ended, increasing tension in the Middle East, following the Egyptian agreement for the purchase of Soviet arms from Czechoslovakia, indicated that although Europe might have reached a rough equilibrium, the Soviet Union would continue to probe for new openings and weaknesses in other parts of the free world.

2. Germany and European Security

The key to such stability as was achieved during the year in Europe itself was the link forged between Germany and the West. In spite of the violent opposition of the Soviet bloc of countries during the first months of the year, the Paris agreements were ratified and in May the German Federal Republic became the fifteenth member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with the right to rearm within the agreed and controlled limits fixed in the Paris agreements to ensure the defensive character of German rearmament.

Although the Soviet Union had asserted that Germany's inclusion in NATO would mean closing the door to a negotiated settlement, it accepted the invitation issued by the three Western powers, shortly after Germany's accession to NATO, to attend a conference of heads of government. As described in a subsequent section, the Soviet Government made other gestures to set the stage for lowering tensions at the Summit Conference and encouraging the eventual neutralization of Germany. Nothing less, they made it clear, would persuade them to consider the unification of Germany through free elections. At both Geneva conferences they rejected Western proposals to guarantee European security in return for their consenting to give a freely reunified Germany a free choice of its future alliances: one-third of Germany, they affirmed, was better than none; the "achievements" of their communist third must not be exposed to the hazards of free elections.

¹ France, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States.