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## SOVIET INITIATIVES 1952 ON GERMAN QUESTION IN BRITISH AND AMERICAN HISTORIOGRAPHY

I. Kaviaka,

*Candidate of History, Associate  
Professor, Assistant Professor  
of the Department of the World History  
and Methods of Teaching History, BSPU*

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## СОВЕТСКИЕ ИНИЦИАТИВЫ 1952 г. ПО ГЕРМАНСКОМУ ВОПРОСУ В АНГЛИЙСКОЙ И АМЕРИКАНСКОЙ ИСТОРИОГРАФИИ

И. И. Ковяко,

*кандидат исторических наук,  
доцент кафедры всеобщей  
истории и методики  
преподавания истории БДПУ*

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This article represents an attempt to define and characterize the main approaches that have emerged in Anglo-American historiography to the analysis of Soviet initiatives of 1952 on the German question. Having studied a wide range of British and American historians' works, the author came to the conclusion that there are two main approaches to the study of this problem: conservative and rationalist. In the regard, Soviet initiatives are examined as a "tactical trick" on the part of the USSR or as a "lost opportunity" of strategic German settlement.

*Keywords:* German question, Stalin Note, German unification, Anglo-American historiography, conservative approach, rationalist approach.

В статье предпринята попытка определить и охарактеризовать основные подходы, сформировавшиеся в англо-американской историографии к анализу советских инициатив 1952 г. по германскому вопросу. На основе изучения широкого круга работ британских и американских историков, автор пришла к выводу о существовании двух основных подходов к исследованию данной проблемы: консервативного и рационалистического. В связи с этим советские инициативы рассматриваются либо как «тактическая уловка» со стороны СССР, либо как «утраченная возможность» оперативного германского урегулирования.

*Ключевые слова:* германский вопрос, Сталина, объединение Германии, английская и американская историография, консервативный подход, рационалистический подход.

The Soviet initiatives of 1952 on the German question, which supposed the creation of a united neutral Germany, not only caused lively discussions in the political and social circles, but were also analysed carefully by the scientific and academic community. First of all, interest in Stalin Note of March 10, 1952 and the ensuing "battle of notes" was shown by historians and specialists in international relations of the USA, Great Britain and West Germany. It was established that two basic approaches have emerged in the Anglo-American historiography of the 2nd half of the XXth and beginning of the XXIth centuries.

The majority of authors follow the conservative trend, which in the Anglo-American historiography of the 2nd half of the XXth century is identified with the school of "containment". The conceptual foundations of this school were formed in the 2nd half of the 1940s after the publication of George F. Kennan's article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct" (Foreign Affairs, July 1947) and the change in the US foreign policy towards the USSR. The policy of

Roosevelt administration, aimed at finding a compromise with the USSR in the matter of postwar settlement, was recognized as mistaken. It was replaced by a policy of "containment" of communism in Germany, Europe and throughout the world.

Representatives of the conservative approach tend to consider Stalin Note as a tactical trick of the Soviet side aimed at preventing the rearmament of West Germany and disrupting negotiations on its inclusion into European and Atlantic integration structures. From their point of view, the Soviet initiatives of 1952 (on March 10, April 9, May 24 and August 23) did not initially contain the basis for constructive discussion and resolution of the German question. It should be noted that American historians predominate among the followers of this approach while such categorical judgments are less peculiar to representatives of the UK scientific community.

As a main argument, representatives of the conservative approach use the date of issue and

sending out the note (the eve of signing a set of documents on the establishment of the European Defense Community with the participation of West Germany). In their opinion, the experience of the quadripartite talks of previous years, the active anti-Western rhetoric of the Soviet media, and the cold reception given to George F. Kennan in Moscow in May 1952 also did not testify to the seriousness of the USSR's intentions to compromise on the German question. American historian, professor **Wolfram Hanrieder** (University of California) in his work "West German Foreign Policy, 1949–1963. International pressure and domestic response" (1967) concluded that Stalin Note was at best "a stratagem aimed at undermining the Western alliance", at worst – "the project to extend Soviet influence to the whole of Germany" [9, p. 71]. The author notes the dangerous nature of Soviet proposals – they deprived the West of German economic and military potential, which by that time was already an essential element of NATO strategic planning [10, p. 52].

Researchers note that the Soviet initiatives contained a lot of uncertainty, some of their points threatened to involve the united Germany in the sphere of influence of the USSR. In particular, it concerned the proposal to ban the activities of any organizations hostile to one of the victorious powers on the territory of a single state. An American historian **James Richardson** (the Center for International Studies at Harvard University) believes that Stalin Note could simultaneously be aimed at delaying the process of West Germany remilitarization as well as political bargaining. In his work "Germany and the Atlantic Alliance: The interaction of strategy and politics" (1966), the author comes to the conclusion that "there was not much hope for an acceptable bargaining", because in the course of previous meetings between the Western Allies and the USSR, too serious disagreements arose over the German problem. Consequently, the main goal of Stalin Note was to prevent the inclusion of the FRG into Western economic and defensive structures. This, in turn, would lead to negative consequences for the economic development and integration of Europe, and could significantly weaken the potential of the North Atlantic Alliance [19, p. 27, 113–114].

A similar position is held by American researchers T. Judt, T. Banhoff, W. Smyser, H. James, and some others. New York University professor **Tony Judt** and professor of the Princeton University **Robert Tucker** agree that the Soviet side did not initially expect and did not seek the consent of the Western countries to create a unified neutral Germany in the center of Europe. It was in the interests of the USSR either to preserve the existing split, allowing each of the

Great Powers to bear their share of responsibility, or to establish Soviet control over the whole of Germany [13, p. 243; 21, p. 280–281]. Professor of California State University **Richard Raak** believed it was obvious that since May 1945, after abandoning the idea of dismembering Germany, Moscow had taken a course to spread Soviet influence to the West. He noted that Joseph Stalin, like Vladimir Lenin, always considered the German factor as the most important in the development of the Soviet foreign policy course [18, p. 56, 58]. According to **Thomas Banhoff** (University of Michigan, USA), the Soviet diplomatic initiative of 1952 pursued a specific goal – to "to pedo German rearmament and drive a wedge between Bonn and Western capitals". Tempting the West German public and some political forces, the prospect of uniting the country was skillfully opposed to the plans for European integration and the rearmament. At the same time, the implementation of Soviet initiatives would allow the USSR to gain a strategic advantage and force out American armed forces from the region of Central Europe [1, p. 25–4, p. 93].

Professor of the Georgetown University of the United States **William Smyser** in his work "From Yalta to Berlin: The Cold War Struggle over Germany" (1999) noted that the archival documents of the USSR and the GDR do not contain evidence that in the 1950s Joseph Stalin was ready to accept the unification of Germany and to abandon the GDR. The vague formulations of the March 1952 note did not let us make out what the Soviet leader really wanted. Theoretically, Joseph Stalin could get a single Germany only allowing the Germans to make their choice in some form. However, by that time, the head of the GDR leadership, Walter Ulbricht, had discredited the communist government so much that the choice of the German people would eventually turn against the USSR. This was the dilemma faced by Joseph Stalin, and the notes of 1952 didn't provide the solution to it [20, p. 118].

Despite the fact that the Stalin Note contained the idea of a united Germany, the West did not consider the price of unification acceptable. The followers of the conservative approach point out the dangerous and unpredictable nature of a single neutral Germany that could either fall into the Soviet sphere of influence or return to "Schaukeln tactic" and try to play on the contradictions between East and West, provoking a third world war [1, p. 26–27; 12, p. 171; 13, p. 244; 19, p. 27]. According to the British historian **Gareth Pritchard** (University of Wales, Swansea), in the long term, the creation of a single neutral Germany could provide the USSR with a relative advantage in a strategic confrontation with Western countries [17, p. 138].

Another group of British and American researchers while studying this problem follows the rationalist approach, which was originally shaped by the British School of International Studies. Representatives of this direction believe that in the first post-war years due to the differences in interests and ideologies the Great Powers had to develop a legislative and diplomatic basis for distinguishing spheres of influence in Germany to avoid the conflict. The Allies succeeded in developing plans for occupation and the possible dismemberment of Germany. Thus the international law and agreements, and not moral principles, acted on the whole procedure of the German settlement [14, p. 173-174].

Rationalists tend to interpret the Stalin Note as a constructive proposal aimed at "resetting" the quadripartite negotiations on the German problem. Representatives of the rationalist approach pay special attention to the factor of negotiations and the search for solutions to international problems with the maximum consideration of every side interests. Many of them express regret in connection with the US abandonment of the Roosevelt foreign policy course in relation to the USSR and the subsequent development of the Cold War. Analyzing the Soviet initiatives of 1952, the authors come to the conclusion that, in view of the West's disinterest in creating a united neutral Germany, they have never been seriously studied or considered as a prerequisite for the resumption of negotiations. The process of including the economic and military-political potential of the FRG in Western structures, forced by the United States in 1950, was by that time irreversible. According to the German historian **Mary Fulbrook** (University College of London), *The American and British plans for western defence were too far developed for them to consider the Soviet offer seriously at this time*, while Stalin Note was genuinely aimed at creating united neutral Germany [5, p. 261; 6, p. 17]. The author is agreed with the British historian, Professor **Donald Watt** (London School of Economics). In his work "Britain looks to Germany" (1965), he notes that in 1952 it was much more important for the United States to retain and preserve West Germany than to realize the project of German unity. In response to the Soviet note, the author saw the final rejection of Western countries from the very idea of discussing the unification of Germany [24, p. 110-111]. American author, advisor to President Roosevelt **James Warburg** in his book "Germany: Key to peace" (1953) concludes that Stalin Note signaled the possible acceptance by the Soviet side of German unification through free elections and the formation of a democratic all-German government [23, p. 270]. At the same time, the author expresses confidence that as far back as 1951 the US

government firmly resolved to preserve Germany's split, because it was "obsessed with the nightmare of the communist tactics of upheavals" [23, p. 175]. Thus, according to the fellow of the University of South Wales, **Norman LaPorte**, the need to bind the FRG firmly to Western integration structures and minimize the risks of the revival of German nationalism made the idea of creating a united neutral Germany unacceptable [2, p. 58].

At the same time, researchers note that Western countries could not directly reject Soviet proposals. This would mean refusing to discuss the very idea of a united Germany and could have a negative impact on the process of signing and ratifying the documents of the European Defense Community. It was also necessary to take into account public opinion on the German question. The disappointment in the German policy of the Western allies, caused by the public refusal of the Big Three to discuss the project of German unity, could Germans from strategic allies into potential enemies, the "fifth column" of NATO in Europe. Under such circumstances, Western response notes were used as a means of delaying the time before the signing of the EDC treaty. Historians **Gerald Hughes** (Aberystwyth University, Wales) and **Spencer Mawby** (London School of Economics) note that the formulation of Western notes was initially unacceptable for the Soviet side. In practice, the West did not take any steps to resume negotiations on the German question [11, p. 16; 15, p. 105].

Representatives of the rationalist approach point out that, despite the absence of obvious evidence in the declassified archival documents, in 1952 Joseph Stalin was very likely ready to abandon the GDR and accept a single neutral Germany [3, p. 254; 15, p. 42]. Professor of the University of Ohio **John Lewis Gaddis** noted that Stalin never aspired to the formation of an independent East German state, and "it is entirely possible that he viewed the East German regime as expendable". In his work "We now know. Rethinking Cold War history", published by Oxford University in 1998, Professor Gaddis called Stalin Note "the last attempt" and "a fragile hope" to reach agreement with the West countries on the German problem [8, p. 127-128]. The American historian Ronald Bitzer adhered to this position. In the article "Soviet Policy on German Reunification in 1952" he came to the conclusion that Joseph Stalin was ready to pay a high price for the unification of Germany for political as well as economic reasons. The rapid increase in the US military budget in the early 1950s, the trade and economic barriers imposed by Western countries against the USSR after the outbreak of the Korean War, the prospect of West German rearmament and the unavoidable costs of reinforcing the

military power of the GDR – all that made the creation of a united neutral Germany and the reduction of tension in the relations of superpowers extremely attractive and relevant for the Soviet leadership. Consequently, diplomatic initiatives on the part of the USSR were “a genuine attempt” to resolve the German problem together with the Western powers [3, p. 251-255].

Thus, two main approaches have emerged in Anglo-American historiography when studying Soviet initiatives of 1952 on the German question. Representatives of the conservative approach (the school of “containment”) view Stalin Note as a tactical trick aimed at disrupting the rearmament of West Germany, its integration into Euro-Atlantic

structures and gaining a strategic advantage in resolving the German problem. The followers of the rationalist approach are more inclined to assess Stalin’s proposals as a lost opportunity for an operative German settlement. Despite the differences, representatives of both conservative and rationalist approaches come to similar conclusions: in late 1952 – early 1953 Joseph Stalin realized the impossibility of rapid German unification and moved to the policy of close integration of the GDR into the Soviet bloc. This course was strengthened after the June uprising in East Germany, the removal of Lavrentiy Beria from power and was finally formed in connection with West Germany joining NATO in 1955.

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