

The Soviet “Struggle for Peace,” the United Nations, and the Korean War

❖ Vladimir Dobrenko

Introduction

The historiography of the Korean War has discussed the extent of Soviet involvement in the Korean War and the collusion among the Soviet Union, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK—North Korea), and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) to spread false allegations that the United States engaged in biological warfare in Korea.¹ However, little has been published about the Soviet Union’s use of the World Peace Council (WPC) to support the allegations of biological warfare and how this effort was linked with Joseph Stalin’s goal to discredit the United Nations (UN).² The only recent exception

1. A. V. Torkunov, *Zagadochnaya voina: Koreiskii konflikt 1950–1953 godov* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2000); Alexandre Mansourov, “Stalin, Mao, Kim and China’s Decision to Enter the Korean War, September 16–October 15, 1950: New Evidence From the Russian Archives,” *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 6–7 (Winter 1995/1996), pp. 94–199; Evgueni Bajanov, “Assessing the Politics of the Korean War,” *CWIHP Bulletin*, No. 6–7 (Winter 1995/1996), pp. 54–69; and Bruce Cumings, *The Origins of the Korean War*, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990). Kathryn Weathersby was among the first Western scholars to gain access to Soviet-era archival materials pertaining to the Korean War in the early 1990s. Her findings were published in various issues of the *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, beginning with “New Findings on the Korean War: Translation and Commentary by Kathryn Weathersby,” *CWHIP Bulletin*, No. 3 (Fall 1993), pp. 14–18. See also “Bruce Cumings and Kathryn Weathersby: An Exchange on Korean War Origins,” *CWHIP Bulletin*, No. 6–7 (Winter 1995/1996), pp. 120–122.

2. See John Clews, *The Communists: New Weapon: Germ Warfare* (London: Lincoln Prager, 1952); Stephen L. Endicott, “Germ Warfare and ‘Plausible Denial’: The Korean War, 1952–1953,” *Modern China*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Winter 1979), pp. 79–104; Stanley I. Kutler, *The American Inquisition: Justice and Injustice in the Cold War* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1982); Albert E. Cowdrey, “Germ Warfare and Public Health in the Korean Conflict,” *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall-Winter 1983), pp. 210–228; John Ellis van Courtland Moon, “Biological Warfare Allegations: The Korean War Case,” *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 666, No. 1 (Winter 1992), pp. 53–83; Tom Buchanan, “The Courage of Galileo: Joseph Needham and the Germ Warfare; Allegations in the Korean War,” *History*, Vol. 86, No. 284 (October 2001), pp. 503–522; Ruth Rogaski, “Nature, Annihilation, and Modernity: China’s Korean War Germ-Warfare Experience Reconsidered,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (May 2002), pp. 381–415; and Nianqun Yang, “Disease Prevention, Social Mobilization and Spatial Politics: The Anti Germ-Warfare Incident of 1952 and the Patriotic Health Campaign,” *Chinese Historical Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Fall 2004), pp. 155–182.

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is an article by Viktoriya Romanova and Yaroslav Shulatov, who outlined the campaign of allegations against the United States up to Stalin's death.³ My purpose here is to examine the fallout of the allegations for the peace campaign and Soviet diplomacy beyond Stalin's death. One other notable exception is Milton Leitenberg, who cited translations of declassified Chinese documents and memoirs to corroborate claims made in Soviet archival materials declassified in the 1990s that the biological warfare disinformation campaign was a coordinated effort pursued by the Soviet Union, the PRC, and the DPRK.⁴ Moreover, Christi Bartman has analyzed Soviet allegations of biowarfare in the UN *not* as a campaign against the UN but as an attempt to use the UN as a platform to obstruct and discredit U.S. efforts in Korea with legalistic jargon.⁵ However, as this article demonstrates, recent archival research shows that Soviet involvement in the WPC's campaign against the alleged use of biological warfare in the Korean War was motivated primarily by the USSR's increasing isolation within the UN and represented an attempt to remedy the situation by discrediting the organization.

First, I provide a brief overview of the creation of the Soviet-dominated WPC and assess its propaganda success up to the beginning of the Korean War. Second, I look at Stalin's rationale for involving the Soviet Union in the Korean War to argue that, with the WPC floundering in its efforts to make the propagandistic impact that Stalin hoped for, the Korean War provided an opportunity for the organization to shore up support by questioning the credibility of the UN while at the same time steering the WPC's focus away from Europe, thus allowing Stalin to consolidate the Eastern bloc with less chance of conflict breaking out. Third, using previously unexamined sources from the Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History (RGASPI), the State Archive of the Russian Federation (GARF), and the Russian State Archive of Recent History (RGANI), I document the WPC's fact-finding mission as part of its report to the UN and the Soviet Union's subsequent retraction of allegations of U.S. use of biological weapons during the Korean War. This article shows that the whole episode was the peak of the Soviet Union's use

3. Viktoriya Romanova and Yaroslav Shulatov, "The Echo of the Khabarovsk Trials: The USSR and the Allegation Campaign against the USA of Using Biological Warfare during the Korean War (1950–1953)," *History of Medicine*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Winter 2018), pp. 262–272, available online at <https://doi.org/10.3897/hmj.5.4.35685>.

4. Milton Leitenberg, "China's False Allegations of the Use of Biological Weapons by the United States during the Korean War," CWIHP Working Paper No. 78, Cold War International History Project, Washington, DC, March 2016.

5. Christi Scott Bartman, "Lawfare: The Use of International Law, Diplomacy and Propaganda by the Soviet Union during the Korean War," *Valabian Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 14 (Winter 2010), pp. 163–188.

of propaganda as a substitute for diplomacy and that Stalin’s death in March 1953 signaled a gradual Soviet return to diplomacy that, by the mid-1950s, effectively sidelined the Soviet peace movement, which never recovered.

The Origins of the WPC and Its Success Leading Up to the Korean War

The formation of the WPC was an outgrowth of Stalin’s failed hope for “quiet revolutions” in Eastern Europe that would avoid any damage to the wartime alliance with Great Britain and the United States. Accordingly, national Communist parties in countries such as Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania would take power slowly and indirectly.⁶ When the Truman administration organized the Marshall Plan to stabilize West European democratic systems against the spread of Communism, the Soviet Union responded by creating the Communist Information Bureau (Cominform) in September 1947 as a Soviet-dominated organization of Communist parties, designed both to supervise their campaign to destabilize the pro-American governments in Western Europe and to consolidate Soviet control of Eastern Europe. The proclamation at the founding meeting of the Cominform of the doctrine of “two camps” by Stalin’s chief ideologue, Andrei Zhdanov, conveyed Moscow’s perception that two hostile blocs had emerged. With this declaration of the Cold War, Soviet leaders no longer viewed the UN as a tool for strengthening their security. With the growth of Soviet military and economic power, the crucial attainment of a nuclear bomb in August 1949, and a deep reluctance to trust the mechanics of a “non-power” club, the Soviet Union was unwilling to rely on the UN for its defense.

Even though the Soviet Union had managed to prop up the Communist parties of the Eastern bloc militarily and politically despite the collapse of the Great Alliance and being outvoted in the UN, officials in Moscow sought to counter Western portrayals of the Soviet takeover of Eastern Europe. They launched their own propaganda campaigns to try to shape a more benign Western view of Soviet intentions. The first such attempt was the Scientific and Cultural Conference for World Peace, held in New York from 25 to 27 March 1949. Nominally organized by the Communist-backed

6. Mark Kramer, “Stalin, Soviet Policy, and the Consolidation of a Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe, 1944-1949,” in Mark Kramer and Vít Smetana, eds., *Imposing, Maintaining, and Tearing Open the Iron Curtain: The Cold War and East-Central Europe, 1945-1989* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), pp. 9-45.

National Council of Arts, Sciences, and Professions, the conference aimed to test the peace campaign abroad as a template for the World Peace Congress that was to be held in Paris the following month. As a propaganda campaign, the conference failed spectacularly, coming under attack from civic organizations. Outside the Waldorf Astoria, where the conference was being held, demonstrators organized by the American Legion and Catholic and patriotic groups harassed the attendees, who included U.S. cultural elites such as Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets, Leonard Bernstein, and Dashiell Hammett. Arthur Miller recounted how “every entrance would be blocked by a line of praying nuns for the souls of the participants, who had been deranged by Satanic seduction.”⁷

The peace campaign also ran into government obstruction in Western Europe. In February 1949, the French government launched an investigation of the French Communist Party, accusing it of gathering intelligence for the USSR. The Interior Ministry arrested four French Communists who worked as representatives for the Soviet Information Bureau.⁸ Problems with the French authorities meant that many delegates were refused visas into the country. As a result, the first World Peace Congress had to take place simultaneously in Paris and Prague. It established a World Peace Committee, led by a twelve-person executive bureau chaired by Frédéric Joliot-Curie, a Nobel Prize-winning physicist and member of the French Academy of Sciences, who had been appointed France’s first High Commissioner for Atomic Energy. Most of the executives were Communists (including Joliot-Curie), and the campaign largely failed to attract non-Communists. France had the biggest delegation: 610 delegates, with 482 Communists; Italy contributed 459 delegates, of whom 256 were Communists. Of the 262 British delegates, 162 were Communists.⁹ The numbers indicated that the congress failed to make a propaganda breakthrough in the West.

The Second World Peace Congress, held in 1950, faced similar problems. It was intended to take place in the city of Sheffield in Great Britain but was forced to convene in Warsaw when the British government cancelled visas that had previously been granted. Subsequently, the UK Cabinet Office decided to exclude about half of the Soviet “support” staff accompanying the delegation, granting only ten of the remaining 40 visa applications and

7. Frances Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 47.

8. Materialy Parizhskogo kongressa 1949 g.; K. I. Sovershenno sekretnyi otchet Korneeva (na 33 stranitsakh) o rabote sovetskoi delegatsii v rabote Podgotovitel'nogo komiteta po sozyvu Vsemirnogo kongressa mira ot 06.02.1949, in GARF, Fond (F) 17, Opis' (Op.) 137, Delo (D.) 27, Llisty (Ll.) 24–30.

9. *Ibid.*, L. 5.

refusing entry to over half of the delegates who did not require visas. The government interpreted the WPC's Stockholm Appeal, a signature-collection campaign for the abolition of nuclear weapons, as a Soviet tool for manipulating the British public. As was later revealed, fewer than 51 million of the purported 500 million signatures were from Western-aligned countries. Of those, France and Italy, the two countries with the largest Communist parties in Western Europe, accounted for 23 million signatures, leaving fewer than 28 million for the rest of Western Europe and all of the countries of the Americas and Asia.¹⁰ Stalin had clearly intended for the Stockholm Appeal to overtake the UN in stabilizing international relations. By making it a global campaign that could rival the UN, the Stockholm Appeal would in essence create a second, competing global entity, with the UN representing a seemingly ineffective organization controlled by U.S. capitalist forces and the WPC supposedly representing the world's ordinary people who were striving for peace.

When the allegations of biological warfare were first made public in May 1951, nearly a year after the outbreak of the Korean War, nothing indicated that they would turn into an official campaign. The Soviet reaction to the DPRK's letter to the UN, protesting alleged U.S. use of biological weapons, was met with a muted response. Although *Pravda* published a statement by the North Korean foreign minister on 10 May, the Soviet newspaper never explicitly endorsed it. After Soviet-backed organizations, such as the Women's International Democratic Federation, and the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs maintained that the lack of convincing evidence did not merit public endorsement, the PRC and the DPRK abandoned the allegations by July.¹¹ Why the Chinese and North Koreans decided to revive the allegations in February 1952 is unclear. From the Soviet perspective, however, it made sense to embark on a propaganda campaign supporting the allegations. For Stalin, this was an opportunity to discredit the UN, depicting it as an enabler of U.S. aggression, and to portray the United States as a genocidal imperialist. Moreover, by 1952 the WPC had conducted a successful global signature campaign that had been co-opted into the Soviet propaganda network to such an extent that Soviet leaders could now compel it to undertake a fact-finding mission to substantiate the allegations. The WPC's involvement in the campaign against the use of biological weapons in February 1952 was a formative experience for

10. Stenogramma zasedanii Byuro Kopengagena, 6–8 Maya 1951 g.—Doklad Izabelly Blyum, in GARE, F. 9539, Op. 1. D. 126, L. 7.

11. Romanova and Shulatov, "The Echo of the Khabarovsk Trials," p. 264.

the organization for all the wrong reasons. Unlike the Stockholm Appeal, the anti-biological warfare campaign was completely out of its control.

Even though the Stockholm Appeal was a top-down campaign initiated at the behest of Stalin and Molotov, the WPC was still allowed a degree of freedom in how it operated. The appeal allowed the WPC to exploit calls for peace based on genuine fears of nuclear war. By contrast, the biological warfare campaign was marked by a complete fabrication of evidence to generate such fear. Prior to the campaign the fear of biological warfare did not grip mass consciousness as nuclear weapons had. Even though members of the WPC, especially the Soviet-bloc members, had made outlandish statements demonizing the United States and its allies, the council had not yet directly fabricated evidence of war crimes.

The WPC's Attempt to Reach Parity with the UN

Practically from the beginning, Soviet officials regarded the anti-nuclear movement as independent of the UN. During the Second World Peace Congress in Warsaw on 19 July 1950, a resolution was passed defining “aggression,” with references to: (1) war of aggression; (2) any type of propaganda that calls for a war of aggression; and (3) the deployment of nuclear weapons for aggressive wars and mass extermination. Yet the wording of the definition of “aggression,” as with other things, had to be submitted and approved by Molotov. The initial version transmitted by Vagan Grigoryan, the head of the International Department of the USSR's ruling All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks), or VKP(b), to Molotov included references to the UN Declaration, all of which Molotov omitted from his draft. The original draft also defined aggression as “any use of non-defensive force by one state against another that is found to be in breach of the UN Security Council regulations as adopted by the UN Charter.” Crucially, the definition also included the following: “The UN Security Council, in accordance with the UN Charter, is responsible for defining ‘aggression’ and ‘aggressor.’”¹² Molotov omitted these references to the UN because the Soviet definition of “aggression” did not match those of the Security Council and the UN Charter.

Ignored by the UN, the Soviet Union's frustration was mounting. The USSR sought not simply to legitimize the Soviet-backed “peace movement” but to have it recognized by international law—as if to place it on the same

12. Doklad Fadeeva Stalinu ob itogakh Vtoroy Vsemirnoy konferentsii mira ot 19 Dekabrya 1950 g., in RGASPI, F. 82, Op. 2, pt. 3, D. 1401, L. 16.

level as the UN. The best time to put forward such a motion would be when the Soviet Union chaired the UN Security Council. In a coded message, Molotov instructed Yakov Malik, the Soviet deputy minister of foreign affairs and ambassador to the UN, to do everything within his power to help the WPC delegation come to New York to hand to the chairman of the UN General Assembly and the chairman of the UN Security Council the WPC's appeal for a peace pact among the five great powers.¹³ At the Berlin session of the WPC, held from 21 to 26 February 1951, the participants decided that the WPC would send a delegation to the UN to demand that it review the various points made in the World Peace Congress's appeal and the WPC's various resolutions, so that the UN would "return to the role that the charter prescribed it, to become a place of agreement between governments and not an instrument of the dominant group."¹⁴ Trygve Lie, the UN Secretary General, agreed to receive the delegation on 9 April 1951 in Paris. However, the impossibility of quickly assembling the delegation (which, in addition to Europeans, included representatives from the PRC, Chile, various African countries, Mexico, and India) soon became clear. Among other things, all the proposed attendees required visas. Because a required letter from Trygve Lie arrived only ten days before the scheduled meeting, the plans had to be abandoned. Joliot-Curie, however, demanded a meeting at the UN itself, and not during a trip to Paris. Lie refused, explaining that he was very busy, constantly leaving New York, and unable to specify exactly when he would be able to receive the delegation there. However, he noted that he had studied the resolution and sent his written response to the WPC. Lie showed little patience for the WPC's propaganda, arguing that the UN acted solely in the interests of peace and peaceful coexistence and was not willing to accommodate "those whose actions aim to weaken the UN, to undermine its credibility and inflate disagreements, the presence of which is inevitable in the global organization [as] not true friends of peace, whatever they may say."¹⁵ Lie guaranteed that if the peace movement "honestly and consciously support[ed] the UN . . . you will get peace."¹⁶

The WPC backed down. Just two days after the scheduled meeting on 10 April, a three-day meeting of the WPC Secretariat convened in Prague,

13. Rezolyutsiya Vsemirnogo Kongressa Mira i Vsemirnogo Soveta Mira v Berline, 21–26 fevralya 1951 g., in RGASPI, F. 82, Op. 2, ch. 3, D. 1397, L. 63.

14. Perepiska s VSM po voprosam bor'by za mir, uchastiya v rabote sessii i komissii VSM, obmena informatsiei i dr., t.1 (5 yanvara–10 iyulya 1951), in GARF, F. 9539, Op. 1, D. 112, L. 122.

15. *Ibid.*, L. 180.

16. *Ibid.*

where members decided not to send any more queries but to appeal to the UN Security Council, albeit with less stubbornness, for Lie to receive the delegation.¹⁷ That is, instead of asking the Secretary General directly to accept a delegation of the WPC, the organization sought an invitation from the UN Security Council.

Lie's refusal to meet with the WPC council may not have been purely attributable to scheduling or even principles. Sensing that the meeting would be seized as a propaganda opportunity by Moscow to legitimize the WPC, he refused to meet. This was a blow to the movement's goal of legitimization by the UN. When the Soviet Union took over the presidency of the Security Council, the WPC had no choice other than to accept Malik's invitation on 16 June. The setback was compounded by a further rebuff. Even when the Soviet Union temporarily held the UN Security Council presidency, the U.S. government had exclusive control over U.S. visas. The secretary general of the WPC, Jean Lafitte, asked the head of the Soviet Peace Committee, Nikolai Tikhonov, to start preparing an application for a U.S. visa. That same day a telegram was sent to U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson and to the U.S. embassy with a request to grant U.S. visas to the delegates. In a repeat of the situation during the Paris Congress in 1949, the U.S. State Department refused to issue visas. Joliot-Curie condemned the State Department for "grossly violating the rights of the President of the Security Council" and claimed that "the UN [was] no longer able to function normally in the United States."¹⁸

The WPC's frustration with the UN spilled into the Helsinki session of the WPC Bureau in July 1951. The head of the Soviet delegation, Aleksandr Fadeev, claimed that the Soviet-backed peace movement must "get the UN to return to its charter . . . [and] continuously criticize and expose the United Nations."¹⁹ Joliot-Curie went on both the offensive and the defensive. Responding to criticism that a peace pact among the five great powers would merely duplicate the UN, he proclaimed that "our work does not in any way contradict the UN Charter. In fact, it is the UN that is not abiding by the principles of its charter."²⁰ He insisted that the WPC had greater legitimacy than the UN insofar as "the task . . . to be the highest international body capable of enforcing the people's will" was entrusted to the WPC "every time agencies

17. *Ibid.*, L. 179.

18. *Materialy sessii Byuro VSM v g.Khel'sinki (protokoly, rezolyutsii, vystupleniya i dr.)*, t.1 (20–21 Iyulya 1951), in GARE, F. 9539, Op. 1, D. 127, Ll. 15–16.

19. *Ibid.*, L. 54.

20. *Ibid.*, L. 13.

that are responsible for preserving peace cease to perform their task!"²¹ Soviet officials went still further in their outlandish claims. At the Third All-Union Peace Conference at the end of November 1951, the Soviet delegation appealed to the WPC, which called the UN "an instrument that serves America's imperialist diktat and more and more is losing humanity's trust," and as a result, "many simple and honest people all over the world turn away in revulsion at the deceiving words and black deals taking place inside the UN and, instead, are appealing to an organization . . . on whose work all honest people all over the world have pinned their hopes—the World Peace Council."²²

The WPC Struggles against the UN

The first initiative of the biological warfare campaign amounted to little more than allegations made in the hopes of stirring up controversy. On 8 May 1951, the North Korean minister of foreign affairs sent a cable to the president of the UN Security Council claiming that the United States had spread smallpox in the DPRK during the period of December 1950–January 1951. The notice failed to stir the intended controversy, and seven months passed before another attempt was made to raise the allegations at the UN. This time the claims were much more specific and detailed. According to an official statement addressed to the UN Secretariat by Bak Hun Yung, the DPRK foreign minister, the United States had dropped several types of insects infected with plague, cholera, and other diseases over North Korean territory on 28–29 January and 11, 13, and 15–17 February 1951.²³

The PRC and DPRK bolstered their new claims by setting up two commissions to oversee investigations and produce reports on their findings. The Soviet-backed International Association of Democratic Lawyers sent a commission to North Korea from 5 to 19 March 1952 to investigate "violations of international law." Concurrently, the Chinese government organized its own investigative commission. Both commissions released reports at the end of March and beginning of April 1952, accusing the United States of war crimes.

21. Dokumenty o zasedaniyakh Byuro Vsemirnogo Soveta Mira v Khel'sinki, in GARF, F. 9539, Op. 1, D. 127, L. 19.

22. Obrashchenie Tret'eyi Vsesoyuznoi konferentsii storonnikov mira ko vsem uchastnikam dvizheniya v zashchitu mira vo vsekhn stranakh, in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 137, D. 530, L. 147.

23. Milton Leitenberg, "New Russian Evidence on the Korean War Biological Warfare Allegations: Background and Analysis," *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, No. 1 (Winter 1998), p. 186.

The Chinese commission also provided its findings and evidence to the “International Scientific Commission for the Investigation of the Facts Concerning Bacterial Warfare in Korea and China,” which the WPC convened. In preparation for the WPC’s commission, Lavrentii Beria, who oversaw the coordination of the biological warfare propaganda campaign with the Chinese and the North Koreans, set up “two false areas of exposure” with cholera bacteria obtained from corpses in China.

Soviet advisers helped create “an unworkable situation,” intimidating the WPC’s “international scientific commission” by setting off explosions near the areas of investigation.²⁴ Prior to the arrival of the WPC-organized commission, the Soviet Ministry of Internal Affairs (headed by Sergei Kruglov) advised the Military Medical Department of the North Korean People’s Army that the United States had spread smallpox. According to a Soviet adviser to the Military Medical Department of the North Korean army, the North Koreans themselves had approached him and other Soviet advisers in late 1951 to help create “sites of infection” and corroborate medical reports before the arrival of the commission. The North Koreans, he recalled, were worried that no convincing sites had yet been created.²⁵

The push to get Soviet propaganda organs involved in the campaign came only at the end of February 1952, when Andrei Gromyko, then the Soviet first deputy minister of foreign affairs, urged Stalin to take steps to publicize U.S. use of biological weapons in the Korean War. He suggested that the Soviet Peace Committee, the International Democratic Federation of Women, and the World Federation of Youth protest against the use of biological weapons and that their actions be publicized in newspapers such as *Pravda*, *Izvestiya*, *Trud*, and *Krasnaya zvezda*. Prior to these efforts, Soviet propaganda organs had not been working closely with one another on the question of biological warfare, resulting in contradictions in the official line. A particularly revealing example of this was a review (titled “Revelations of an American Cannibal”) by Leonid Kremontsov in *Pravda* on 6 July 1950 of a book by Columbia University Professor of Microbiology Theodor Rosebury.²⁶ Upon reading the review, Sergei Striganov, then working in the Soviet Foreign Ministry, wrote a scathing letter about it to Boris Ponomarev, the deputy head of the VKP(b) Department of Relations with Foreign Communist Parties, explaining how

24. *Ibid.*, p. 195.

25. *Ibid.*

26. The book discussed by Kremontsov was Theodor Rosebury, *Peace or Pestilence: Biological Warfare and How to Avoid It* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1948).

Kremetsov had misled readers and taken quotations out of context.²⁷ The review misquoted Rosebury to suggest that he wanted war, whereas his book actually took the opposite view, warning that if a third world war broke out the consequences would be more horrible than those of the second. Ignoring Rosebury's actual thesis, Kremetsov claimed that "the most enraging and repulsive part of the book is where this imperialist lackey diligently confirms to his masters that he and his 'academic colleagues' are ready to kill people without hesitation."²⁸

Striganov sharply disagreed with Kremetsov and reminded Ponomarev that Rosebury was not only a pacifist but also one of the founders of the Congress in Defense of Peace, which took place in New York in March 1949. Furthermore, Rosebury was a member of the preparatory committee for the "progressive" U.S. delegates who would attend the Second All-World Peace Congress. Kremetsov's gross defamation, Striganov argued, not only was wildly inaccurate but also hurt the movement. Striganov's appeal to Ponomarev did not, however, stop the microbiologist Mariya Pokrovskaya from calling Rosebury a "fascist microbiologist" at the conference and damning him as "deader than a corpse" that had "died alive from shame . . . in the eyes of all honest people."²⁹

The WPC also found itself unprepared for the biological warfare campaign. Initially, the campaign was intended to be a strictly Chinese-North Korean operation undertaken with Soviet assistance. Problems came to a head in March 1952 when the PRC and DPRK ignored Soviet advice to produce more convincing evidence before going public with their allegations. Even with the preparation of false areas of contamination and China's investigative committee issuing a report, the campaign lacked international credibility.

The findings of the Chinese and North Korean reports were presented at a weeklong emergency session of the WPC in East Berlin at the beginning of July 1952. The conclave, which mostly involved preaching to the converted, generated little publicity outside the WPC. The main problem was believability. The Chinese, North Korean, and Soviet participants knew that their campaign would be wholly discredited if an "unbiased inquiry" were to take place.³⁰ But, as a Chinese representative to the WPC noted, the PRC and DPRK "did not consider the International Committee of the Red Cross

27. Pis'mo Striganova (otdel MID) B. Ponomarevu - 3 oktyabrya 1950 g., in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 137, D. 236, L. 161.

28. *Ibid.*, L. 144.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Leitenberg, "New Russian Evidence," p. 186.

Committee sufficiently free of political influence to be capable of instituting an unbiased inquiry.” The same was true of the World Health Organization (WHO), as an organ of the UN. The solution thus lay in creating an “international commission” that would affirm the findings of the Chinese report. This was where the WPC came in.

From the Soviet perspective, the WPC was slow to take the initiative in organizing an “international scientific commission” to consider the Chinese and North Korean allegations. In the past when Soviet leaders wanted action from the WPC, they would exert indirect pressure on the organization. However, the biological warfare allegations put the USSR in the challenging position of supporting allies while at the same time risking credibility in the UN. Having been notified by Mao Zedong in late February 1952 of the supposed U.S. use of biological weapons, Stalin publicly backed the allegations at the UN, where neither the PRC nor the DPRK was a member.

Organizing an international commission of scientists to get involved in a fact-finding mission was not a simple task, however. The WPC was ill prepared to keep up with the rapid pace of diplomatic developments. Senior figures in the organization, particularly from the Soviet Union, understood that the campaign would be in jeopardy if it continued in the same direction. The WPC convened in Oslo from 29 March to 1 April 1952 for a bureau session to discuss propaganda based on Chinese and North Korean “evidence.” In a letter to Stalin at the beginning of April, Fadeev complained that after examining various documents regarding U.S. use of biological weapons, he had to conclude that the “material suffers from great shortcomings.”³¹ Even if the Chinese and North Korean evidence of biological warfare had not been so flimsy, the WPC’s inept handling of this evidence further undermined the credibility of the campaign in the UN. The council’s propaganda mimicked what a real scientific investigative report would look like. Weaknesses included merely stating facts with no corroborating proof, presenting the same facts backed up by different sources, and reporting different dates and different names for the same eyewitnesses (partly a result of different transliterations). More glaringly, the WPC’s propaganda was wrong about basic facts. For example, the WPC-sponsored report mentioned lice as an agent for the spread of cholera and depicted the onset of symptoms immediately after the alleged biological weapons were dropped from planes, with no consideration for an

31. “O pomoshchi Vsemirnogo Soveta Mira v Kampanii protiv bakteriologicheskoi voyny amerikanskikh voennykh v Koree i Kitae”—pis'mo Fadeeva Stalinu (7 aprelya 1952 g.), in RGASPI, F. 5, Op. 22, D. 812, L. 53.

incubation period. Fadeev warned that "hostile propaganda will seize on these errors."³²

Efforts to "corroborate" the allegations became a top priority for the Soviet regime. Whereas the Soviet Foreign Ministry had coordinated past campaigns, the Communist Party now took control. Grigoryan, the head of the VKP(b) International Department, wrote to a high-ranking VKP(b) official, Mikhail Suslov, at the beginning of May 1952, complaining that the WPC Secretariat "should have by now enlarged the international campaign against biological weapons and established an international commission for fact-finding on American aggression."³³ Grigoryan argued that the Secretariat had been "deficient in carrying out the tasks assigned to it" and that Andrei Smirnov, the deputy head of the VKP(b) International Department, should be sent to the WPC headquarters in Prague to oversee matters.

Under VKP(b) supervision, a committee was formed at the Prague headquarters in March 1952 to conduct a massive assessment of propaganda. Ilya Ehrenburg, the well-known Soviet writer and deputy chair of the Soviet Peace Committee, reported in early April 1952 that even though the committee "sorted out the documents and removed improper scientific terms, . . . we need to demand that our Chinese and Korean comrades thoroughly edit all materials concerning the use of biological weapons by the Americans."³⁴ Aiming to block all future Chinese and North Korean reports from being publicized before careful revision and editing, Ehrenburg suggested that all documents intended for the WPC be sent only to Prague, where the flow of information was easier to control. Like Fadeev, Ehrenburg understood that bad propaganda had helped "reactionary forces [to conduct] an energetic counteroffensive . . . to prove that the uproar surrounding the use of biological weapons in Korea and China is just a badly staged dramatization orchestrated by the Chinese and Korean communists."³⁵

Ehrenburg, like other Soviet delegates to the WPC and the staff at the VKP(b) International Department, viewed the Chinese and North Korean reports as a liability for the campaign and believed that the only way to salvage it was to form a special fact-finding investigative commission. Fadeev had already outlined this conclusion in a memorandum to Stalin in early April

32. Ibid.

33. Pis'mo Predsedatelya Komissii po vneshnei politike TsK V. Grigoryana M. A. Suslovu ot 6 maya 1952 g., in RGASPI, F. 5, Op. 22, D. 812, L. 30.

34. Pis'mo Erenburga Molotovu (ot 11.04.1952), in RGASPI, F.82, Op. 2, pt. 3, D. 1396, L. 225.

35. Ibid., L. 224.

1952.³⁶ The commission would have to include, besides the leading members of the Soviet Peace Committee, bacteriologists, experienced military specialists, and knowledgeable writers and journalists, among them people who actually understood Chinese and Korean. Fadeev hoped that the committee would include prominent scholars, lawyers, and religious figures who were not part of the peace movement. Fadeev's memorandum demonstrates the hierarchy of access to information. Up to that point, he had not participated in the falsification of evidence, nor did he have any knowledge of it. As a recipient of the propaganda, his task was to make it more presentable to the public.

The Soviet Union also had more pressing reasons to want a Soviet-backed international scientific commission to convene quickly and investigate the biological weapons allegations. On 4 March 1952, speaking at the UN, Secretary of State Acheson categorically denied the accusations of biological warfare and cast doubt on the veracity of the allegations. He requested an immediate investigation by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or the WHO. On 12 March the ICRC contacted the Chinese and North Koreans about sending a small team composed of three Swiss members, two Indians, and a Pakistani. The pressure on the Chinese and North Koreans was compounded by direct appeals from the Red Cross Societies in the Soviet-bloc states to investigate "U.S. atrocities." Over the next six weeks, the ICRC called three more times on the Chinese and North Koreans to allow for the opportunity to investigate their allegations. Soviet and PRC officials seemed not to know how to respond to the ICRC's request. Malik, the Soviet ambassador to the UN who had introduced the bacterial warfare charges into the work of the UN Disarmament Commission on 14 March, rejected the ICRC's offer. The PRC refused to respond to the ICRC's offer and instead published articles denouncing the ICRC as a "most vicious and shameless accomplice and lackey of American imperialism," whose only purpose was "to find out the effectiveness of the American aggressors' unparalleled, brutal crime."³⁷ On 30 April the ICRC officially retracted its offer to investigate the allegations.

From the outset, the WPC's involvement in the biological warfare campaign was tightly controlled by Moscow and was hindered by all the dysfunctions of Soviet propaganda organs. In a telegram to the head of the Soviet Peace Committee, Tikhonov, WPC Secretary General Lafitte pointed out that TASS had reported on 17 May about the arrival of the WPC investigative committee in North Korea and China to investigate the alleged U.S. use

36. Pis'mo Predsedatelya Komissii po vneshnei politike TsK V. Grigoryana M. A. Suslovu ot 6 maya 1952 g., in RGASPI, F. 5, Op. 22, D. 812, Ll. 52–54.

37. Leitenberg, "New Russian Evidence," p. 190.

of biological weapons, when in fact the committee had not yet been fully set up.³⁸

The committee, once it did take shape, was led by Joseph Needham, a well-known British biochemist and Marxist who had participated in an investigation of Japanese biological warfare in China during World War II. Others on the committee included Ellenor Andrea Andreen, a Swedish doctor, radical pacifist, member of the Socialist Party, and chair of the Soviet-backed Swedish Organization for Democratic Women; and Jean Malterre, a French zoologist and head of laboratory at the French Academy of Agriculture. Before making the trip to China and North Korea, the committee members were flown to Moscow for a briefing with the Soviet Peace Committee. They were given just one week, from 11 to 18 June, to review the materials that Yves Farge, the head of the French Peace Committee, had brought back with him after a three-day stay in North Korea.

Soviet officials made clear to the investigators that their task was to prove that bioweapons had been used and had been dropped from U.S. aircraft.³⁹ This was not an easy goal to accomplish. Although the members of the investigative committee were pro-Soviet, most of them expressed skepticism about the mission from the very start. They were keenly aware that the lack of more neutral participants, such as the heads of the Red Cross, would give their investigation little credibility in the eyes of the international community.

The executive secretary of the Soviet Peace Committee, Mikhail Kotov, informed Grigoryan that the committee members "were treating the situation in China and Korea not as a case of biological warfare, but as an experiment in the use of biological weapons." They believed that the allegations published by Chinese academics regarding the use of insects infected with bacteria in China and North Korea lacked a scientific basis. At the initiative of Andreen, the committee discussed what tangible evidence was needed to prove that the United States had used biological weapons. As is evident from the report, the prevailing mood among the committee members was one of uncertainty and dispiritedness. Their uncertainty stemmed in part from the unwillingness of other Western scientists to work with the committee and "put their careers at risk."⁴⁰ The investigative committee faced the difficult task of producing a substantiated statement through the WPC regarding U.S. biological warfare that would be accepted by the international community. WPC officials feared

38. M. Kotova (sekretar' SKZM) zapiska V. P. Tereshkinu (SS) ot 20 maya 1952 g., in RGASPI, F. 5, Op. 22, D. 812, Ll. 65–66.

39. Doklad Kotova (ot 30-9-1952), in RGASPI, F. 17, Op. 137, D. 815, Ll. 57.

40. Ibid.

that the credibility of the “world peace movement” was on the line. If the allegations were broadly accepted, it would elevate the WPC to a status comparable to that of the UN, but failure would discredit the whole movement.

Kotov himself expressed doubt about the effectiveness of the assignment, stating that “the committee will not have much authority behind it because its members are not bacteriologists but peace activists.”⁴¹ This was an accurate assessment. Most members of the investigative committee were chosen for their political leanings rather than their scientific bona fides. Andreen and Malterre urged the expansion of the committee and even sent telegrams to Joliot-Curie suggesting that the chairmen of the ICRC and the Human Rights League, along with prominent bacteriologists, be included. But because the Chinese and North Koreans made such additions next to impossible, no bacteriological experts were on hand to analyze evidence effectively. As a result, Needham was on the verge of stepping down as head of the committee before departing for Beijing. He said “he did not consider himself a member of the committee and could not take on the responsibility because he was not a bacteriologist.”⁴² He was therefore willing only to “maintain contact and assist the members of the committee.”⁴³

The committee’s investigation in North Korea and China took place from 23 June to 31 August 1952. To differentiate this work from the Chinese investigation that had been taking place since mid-March, WPC members called on the Chinese to present their evidence at the World Peace Congress scheduled to take place in East Berlin on 1–6 July 1952. By Kotov’s account, the members of the committee, arriving in Moscow after their investigation, had a completely different outlook on the situation. Kotov claimed that Needham by this point was “proud to have been given the task of investigating the facts of America’s use of biological weapons in Korea.”⁴⁴ Kotov reported that Needham, after “reviewing the evidence of America’s use of biological weapons against China and Korea up-close, was certain beyond any doubt that the USA waged biological warfare. There was irrefutable evidence on the matter.”⁴⁵

However, Andreen’s and Needham’s own accounts of the investigation differ greatly from Kotov’s. Both of them expressed a deep sense of doubt

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid.

44. Ibid., Ll. 113.

45. Ibid.

about the conditions under which the investigative committee worked. Andreen acknowledged that "the scientific foundation of the Commission's work consisted of the fact that the delegates implicitly believed the Chinese and North Korean accusations and evidence."⁴⁶ Needham was even more ambivalent, admitting that he had no actual proof that what the Chinese and North Koreans had shown were samples of plague bacillus from the alleged swarms of voles contaminated by U.S. aircraft, suggesting that it was "possible to maintain that the whole thing was a kind of patriotic conspiracy."⁴⁷ But Needham preferred to take the Chinese at their word.

As a result, the massive report compiled by the committee in late 1952 added little to the "evidence" the Chinese and North Koreans were already publishing through their own investigative committee. Some 30 years later, Needham recounted the committee's dependence on whatever the Chinese and North Koreans were willing to produce as evidence, with the committee permitted to see only "specimens of the containers that had been used and of the vectors as well as victims of the attacks."⁴⁸ The testimonies and reports that the committee accepted were all formulaic. A typical report would start with a scenario such as: "On 26 March 1952 at 9:00 in the evening American planes . . . peasants hearing the noise came outside or saw a crater nearby with mosquitoes, lice, flies, ticks or spiders in the snow."⁴⁹ Essentially, the investigative committee received propaganda and then tried to convert it into "evidence" presentable to the UN.

On the diplomatic front, the investigative committee's report did nothing to persuade the international community that the United States had used biological weapons in China and North Korea. The U.S. delegates at the UN, who had been calling since July for a UN-organized committee to investigate the allegations, dismissed the WPC report out of hand. Except for the Soviet Union, the UN Security Council members voted unanimously in favor of establishing a UN investigative commission, but the Soviet vote against it was a veto. The United States responded by introducing a draft resolution affirming that if the DPRK, PRC, and USSR refused an impartial investigation, the charges must be presumed false and a malicious fabrication.

46. Zapiska M. Kotova (sekretar' Sovkoma zashchity mira) V. P. Tereshkin (TsS) (dat. 20-5-1952), in RGASPI, F. 5, Op. 22, D. 812, Ll. 69–72.

47. Leitenberg, "New Russian Evidence," p. 187.

48. Peter Williams and David Wallace, *Unit 731: The Japanese Army's Secret of Secrets* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), p. 255, quoted in Leitenberg, "New Russian Evidence," p. 187.

49. See the report materials housed in RGASPI, F. 5, Op. 22, D. 812. The specific passage is from L. 99.

Ultimately, the biological weapons disinformation campaign died with Stalin. As the new leaders of the Soviet Union scrambled to find a political solution to the Korean War in the wake of Stalin's death on 5 March 1953, the biological weapons campaign lost its *raison d'être*. On 7 April 1953, a day before the United States finally managed to get its proposed investigative committee adopted by the UN Political Committee, the USSR offered to withdraw its allegations of biological warfare if the United States dropped its proposal for a UN investigative committee. The issue faded by the end of July, with no clear diplomatic victory for either the Soviet Union or the United States. Although the United States managed to use the UN to delegitimize the Soviet-backed and WPC-organized investigative committee, China's and North Korea's refusal to cooperate meant that a UN-organized fact-finding committee could not investigate the allegations. On 28 July, the president of the UN General Assembly reported that the committee had been unable to accomplish its task. The Korean War and the subsequent disinformation campaign allowed Stalin to engage in a new propaganda battle that put the United States on the defensive, but it had no lasting benefits. The decision by Stalin's successors to change course so quickly and drastically after Stalin's death indicates that the propaganda battle against the UN brought the Soviet Union no closer to the diplomatic prestige it had been seeking.

The Shift toward Diplomacy: The WPC's Gradual Marginalization

After Stalin's death in March 1953, Soviet foreign policy refocused on European collective security and the question of Germany's reunification. Cold War tensions eased. As early as January 1954, U.S. business executives began to travel to the Soviet Union to establish contacts in their industries. After Stalin's death, small groups from both sides were soon making visits. The following year, several "reciprocal visits" took place. U.S. executives from the steel, agricultural, housing, and electrification industries visited the Soviet Union, and Soviet delegates came to the United States.⁵⁰ During these two years, the West and especially the Soviet Union began to understand the value of such exchanges in normalizing relations. The biological warfare campaign showed that securing the status quo in Europe would be achieved not by waging a struggle against the UN but by reopening diplomatic channels. This

50. Mark B. Smith, "Peaceful Coexistence at All Costs: Cold War Exchanges between Britain and the Soviet Union in 1956," *Cold War History*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2012), pp. 546–547.

normalization of relations rested on the understanding that neither side would exploit indirect conflicts, such as the Suez Crisis, or intra-bloc crises, such as the Soviet invasion of Hungary, to destabilize the status quo. These strengthened links were institutionally de-Stalinized in the USSR immediately after the Suez-Budapest diplomatic breakdown. The State Committee for Cultural Ties was formed, and the All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (the Stalin-era organization for promoting cultural ties abroad) was replaced by the Union of Soviet Societies of Friendship and Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries.⁵¹ Soviet-British relations, for example, were reestablished with the formation of the Soviet Relations Committee of the British Council, shortly before Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech in February 1956 denouncing the Stalin personality cult. In 1955, the committee was involved in arranging eighteen visits from the Soviet Union to Britain, ranging from large delegations of doctors to trips by single scholars. By 1956, 29 such visits had taken place. In the context of these new diplomatic developments, the peace campaign was becoming increasingly irrelevant.

Stalin's successors realized that they could gain legitimacy in the West far more effectively by opening official diplomatic channels than by conducting intrusive campaigns aimed at putting public pressure on Western governments. The thaw in relations was spurred not by a new peace campaign but by old-fashioned diplomacy. From 18 to 27 April 1956, Khrushchev, the First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and Nikolai Bulganin, chairman of the USSR Council of Ministers, led a delegation to Britain for frank discussions of the European status quo. As Mark B. Smith argues, "the visit had most of the trappings of a state visit and all of the punch of candid talks between the two countries' [most powerful politicians]." It was a historic juncture that symbolized a new "transnational" reality: a powerful array of links had pierced the Iron Curtain after Stalin's death.⁵² These links—in culture, science, education, trade, technology, sports, and politics—not only ensured the peaceful coexistence of the Soviet Union and Britain but also made possible the sustainable international system of the post-Stalin Cold War.

Khrushchev's leadership meant that the WPC became entangled in the rapidly evolving diplomacy that entailed back-and-forth proposals and counterproposals between the Soviet Union and the West. This pattern continued over the next three years, including at the Berlin Conference in January 1954,

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 548–549.

52. *Ibid.*, p. 538.

the Geneva Summit in May 1955, and the Geneva Conference in October 1955. More importantly, Soviet leaders concluded that stabilization of the Western and Eastern blocs could be achieved only through diplomacy and not with peace campaigns. In April 1956, Khrushchev further strengthened this approach, and when a potential diplomatic breakdown occurred during the Suez Crisis and the Soviet invasion of Hungary in October and November, the Soviet leader came to understand that peace propaganda campaigns, viewed by Western governments as a destabilizing force, could be a threat to Soviet diplomatic efforts.

Conclusion

On 24 December 1948, Molotov submitted a draft resolution to the VKP(b) Politburo in which he formulated the tasks of both the Paris Congress and the entire Soviet-backed peace movement:

The [Paris] Congress should not be limited to general declarations on strengthening peace and international security but should set as its central task active international public support for the proposals of the Soviet Union on the reduction of arms of great powers and the prohibition of atomic weapons as weapons of aggression.⁵³

For Soviet leaders, the peace movement was to serve as an antidote to the UN, where the USSR was in the minority. Molotov wanted the Paris Congress to

expose the secretly aggressive and reactionary nature of the resolutions of the UN General Assembly, which rejected the proposal of the Soviet Union on the reduction of arms of the five great powers and the banning of nuclear weapons and to show that these proposals of the Soviet Union enjoy broad and active support from democratic forces around the world.⁵⁴

The Soviet-backed peace movement was thus to function exclusively as an instrument of Soviet foreign policy that would directly challenge the UN by presenting itself as a global mass movement.

In the late 1940s, Stalin sought to strike a balance between, on the one hand, consolidating and defending Soviet postwar prestige and, on the other hand, reversing the ever-increasing diplomatic isolation in which the Soviet

53. Arkhiv Politbyuro TsK, Direktivnye ukazaniya sovetsoi delegatsii na s"ezde vo Vroslave 25–28 Avgusta 1948 g. (utverzhdenny Politbyuro 14 avgusta 1948 g.), in RGANI, F. 3, Op. 21, chast' 2, L. 15.

54. *Ibid.*, L. 19.

Union found itself. The WPC's involvement in the biological warfare disinformation campaign highlighted the difficulty of balancing these two objectives during the transitional period between Stalin's final years and the emergence of collective leadership after his death. The campaign also indicated that Soviet propaganda strategies were outdated. The involvement of prominent Western scientists to shore up the credibility of the allegations did nothing to broaden support for the WPC or to delegitimize the UN.

The decision by Stalin's successors to pursue a settlement of the Korean War and to abandon the biological warfare disinformation campaign suggests that Khrushchev had by then come to terms with the Soviet Union's place in the UN, seeing a way forward through traditional diplomacy. The problem was that the WPC, which Soviet officials saw as a counterweight to the UN, became increasingly irrelevant. The failure of the biological warfare disinformation campaign not only highlighted this irrelevance but also became a key moment for Western Communists and prominent left-leaning figures, who up to that point had failed to see the WPC as purely an instrument for Soviet diplomacy. By the end of 1956, when the Soviet Union had reestablished ties with Great Britain, it felt confident enough, despite its continued isolation in the UN, to reaffirm its grip on the Eastern bloc by invading Hungary on 4 November, irrespective of the damage the invasion would do to the WPC's credibility in the eyes of left-leaning Westerners.