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SOVIET SHORT-TERM INTENTIONS REGARDING BERLIN AND GERMANY

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

The following intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate: The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Departments of State, the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and The Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 25 April 1961. Concurring were The Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State; the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army; the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB, and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

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SOVIET SHORT-TERM INTENTIONS REGARDING BERLIN AND GERMANY

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable Soviet intentions with respect to Berlin and Germany over the next six months or so.

CONCLUSIONS

1. We believe that in the relatively near future the USSR will present a formal demand for a renewal of negotiations on the question of a peace treaty for "the two Germanies" and a new status for Berlin. Almost certainly, Khrushchev still prefers to negotiate on this matter rather than to provoke a crisis by unilateral action, chiefly because he desires to avoid the risks of a showdown in this dangerous area of East-West confrontation. He apparently still hopes that, if he keeps in reserve the threat of a unilateral move, Western fears of a showdown will induce the Allies to make concessions at the bargaining table. (*Paras. 5, 9, 11*)

2. In raising this issue once again the USSR's chief concern will be to strengthen the East German regime by eroding and eventually eliminating the Western position in Berlin, and by bringing the West to recognize the permanence and legitimacy of that regime. The Soviets

also hope that success in this will undermine West Germany's confidence in its present policy of participation in NATO's military effort, since it remains a primary Soviet purpose to check the buildup of significant military power in the Federal Republic. (*Paras. 6-8*)

3. In any negotiations which take place in the next few months, the Soviets would almost certainly not hold fast to their maximum demand for a peace treaty with "the two Germanies" and the immediate conversion of West Berlin into a "demilitarized free city." Instead they will concentrate on getting an "interim agreement," of the kind outlined at Geneva in 1959, which would constitute a first step toward eliminating Allied occupation rights in West Berlin. The USSR might in the course of negotiations reduce some of its previous demands concerning such an interim settlement if it could obtain an agreement, which, at least by implica-

tion, put a time limit on these occupation rights. This outcome would be intended to lay the groundwork for later advances and would be, in the Soviet view, a major gain. (*Paras. 12-15*)

4. If higher level negotiations do not take place, or if they break down, the USSR might agree to refer the problem to lower level talks. More likely, however, it would move to summon a Bloc-sponsored peace conference and would eventually sign its long-threatened separate peace treaty with the GDR. Subsequently, the Soviets could transfer to the GDR control

over Allied access and, sooner or later, permit that regime gradually to apply a policy of harassments. As another way of exerting pressure, they might choose to exploit the vulnerabilities of German civilian access, a course which would not directly threaten the Allied position but could seriously undermine the integrity of West Berlin. Under this or any other policy, however, the USSR is likely to continue to offer negotiations, always hopeful that the Allies can be induced to accede peacefully to the eventual loss of the Western position in Berlin. (*Paras. 19-21*)

DISCUSSION

Soviet Policy Considerations

5. Recent Soviet public and private statements make it clear that the USSR intends to raise the issue of Berlin and Germany again, and a formal diplomatic initiative to this end will probably be launched in the relatively near future. Khrushchev has indicated an unwillingness to wait for the West German elections due in September, and he would probably like to be able to point to some activity on this question at the Party Congress in October. His manner and timing in raising this issue will depend on the movement of events generally in East-West relations, which will in turn be heavily conditioned by developments in such crisis areas as Laos and Cuba. In general we believe that the Soviets would consider the Berlin issue too sensitive to press very hard if tensions were already high because of developments elsewhere. But an appearance of disunity or disarray in the Western Alliance, such as may result from the present internal crisis in France, might lead the Soviets to believe that a favorable moment had arisen to demand new negotiations. In any case, we believe that the Soviets will try to find a way, sometime during the next six

months or so, to revive this problem from its present relatively dormant state.

6. The course of events in the last two years, including the Soviet proposals at Geneva and Paris, indicates that the Soviets, in returning to this issue, will be raising it primarily for the sake of certain objectives with respect to Berlin and Germany themselves, rather than because they wish to use it as a lever in discussing other questions. These objectives have remained essentially unchanged since Khrushchev precipitated the Berlin crisis in the winter of 1958-1959. The USSR believes that its puppet regime in East Germany cannot be finally stabilized so long as West Berlin continues to exist in the heart of the country as a route of escape,¹ a center of anti-GDR activities, and a reminder of Western refusal to reconcile itself to the permanent division of Germany. In addition, Moscow seeks to use the advantages of its strong local position in the Berlin area to extract greater international recognition for the GDR, both in order to

¹ After a period of decline until the spring of 1960, the refugee flow began to increase. In the first quarter of 1961, about 34,000 persons escaped through West Berlin, approximately 70 percent more than during the corresponding period of 1960.

strengthen that regime and to extinguish latent German hopes for reunification on any other than Soviet terms. Further, the Soviets hope that, in the long run, legalizing the division of Germany would reduce a potential military threat to the GDR on the part of a rearmed West Germany.

7. Moscow is also keenly aware of the psychological gains which would accrue from Western concessions in this area. Even a partial Western retreat would be exploited among America's allies, in both parts of Germany, and most of all among the West Berliners, as proof that the "world relation of forces" was shifting irrevocably in favor of the Bloc, that the US was unwilling in this new phase to maintain its commitments, and that further Western retreats were inevitable. In particular, the Soviets would hope to undermine West Germany's confidence in its present policy of participation in NATO's military effort, since it remains a primary Soviet purpose to check the buildup of significant military power in the Federal Republic.

8. In a certain sense Khrushchev is under pressure to make progress in the near future toward these objectives. This is not because he is being urged by a specific group of other Soviet leaders to adopt a harder line. Nor does our considerable evidence on the Sino-Soviet dispute indicate that the Chinese Communists exert an important influence here. The commitment of Soviet prestige in the Berlin situation does exert a kind of pressure on Khrushchev to make good, although this has probably become somewhat attenuated with the passage of time and the postponement of several potential showdowns. But the chief pressures are those arising from the weaknesses inherent in the position of the GDR, which has continued to encounter serious problems in consolidating its rule and developing its economy. East German boss Ulbricht is the spokesman for these pressures, and while Ulbricht himself may have little personal weight in Soviet councils, the USSR as the party ultimately concerned to maintain and extend Communist power in Central Europe shares fully his desire to stabilize the GDR by repairing these weaknesses.

9. Anxious as the Soviets are to achieve these objectives, they nevertheless remain acutely conscious that Berlin is potentially the most dangerous point in the entire range of East-West confrontations. Despite his evident caution, Khrushchev probably still doubts that the Western Powers are actually willing to run substantial risks of general war over the question of East German administration of their access to Berlin. Nevertheless, he recognizes that the US is so deeply committed in Berlin that it might react forcefully in response to interference with its access to the city. He would clearly prefer to seek concessions via negotiation, at least until he has further opportunity to gauge the temper of the new American Administration. This attitude is reinforced by his desire to preserve a "peace-loving" pose and to demonstrate, before resorting to unilateral measures, that he has offered the Allies every chance for a negotiated solution.

10. Thus, while the USSR ultimately seeks absorption of West Berlin and full recognition for the GDR, Moscow has realized from the outset that these goals must be approached by stages. The "free city" is intended as such a stage, while the subsequent proposals for an "interim status" for West Berlin are designed to prepare the way toward a "free city." Similarly, Western agreement to the Soviet-proposed all-German commission would be a stage toward full recognition of the GDR, as would agreement to negotiate a peace treaty with the two German states. The Soviets expect their full program to require a number of years; what they seek in 1961 is a start on that program, not only to bring its realization nearer, but also to establish the presumption that further steps are to follow.

Probable Soviet Tactics

11. At some point in the course of its diplomatic explorations with the new US Administration, the USSR will probably broach the idea of negotiations on Berlin and Germany. While the forum and time cannot be predicted, Moscow will probably seek to obtain formal talks, perhaps at the highest level, and to schedule them for some time during this

year. Having achieved the participation of the GDR in the Foreign Ministers' Conference of 1959, the Soviets would probably press for this again if the talks were held at that level. A relatively correct approach seems to be the preferred Soviet tactic at present, and the USSR probably will not resort to strong pressures unless it judges that negotiations cannot be obtained in any other way. Nevertheless, an invitation to negotiate will probably be accompanied by semiofficial, low-key reminders of the vulnerability of the Western position in Berlin. The Soviets may also permit sporadic harassments during this period by the GDR against German access through the Soviet Zone and across the sector border within the city.

12. The maximum Soviet position calls for concluding peace treaties with both German states and, as an integral feature of this settlement, the conversion of West Berlin into a "demilitarized free city." Failing this, Moscow has threatened to sign a separate treaty with the GDR and thereafter to turn over to that regime the control of Allied access routes to the city. These demands may well be the initial Soviet position in any new negotiations, but the USSR showed itself ready, both at Geneva in 1959 and at Paris in 1960, to bargain for lesser immediate gains, and we believe it would probably prove willing to do so again.

13. Recent restatements of the Bloc's position indicate that the USSR continues to think primarily in terms of an "interim agreement" on West Berlin, valid only for a fixed period, combined with provisions for a commission in which the two German states would try to work out the terms of a peace treaty. This will probably be, if not the initial Soviet proposal, a fallback position introduced fairly early in any discussions. Its chief virtue from the Soviet viewpoint is its "interim" nature; by this means the USSR seeks to document a Western commitment to further steps in the same direction at a stipulated future date.

14. The main conditions for West Berlin during this interim period would probably again be reductions in Western troop levels, controls on propaganda and subversive activities, and

the creation of a Big Four commission to supervise the agreement. These provisions are designed to inject the USSR into the affairs of the city and to undercut the Allies' original rights of occupation by means of a new agreement, limited in duration, to which the USSR is a party and with which the GDR is associated. The formation of an all-German commission would be intended to extract *de facto* recognition of the GDR.

15. Proposals of this sort, however, may not represent the Soviet minimum position. If Khrushchev came to feel that the West was willing to let negotiations founder at this point, he might offer an interim agreement on more moderate terms. The USSR might agree, for example, to a ceiling on Western troops in West Berlin rather than insist on their reduction. Or it might drop its demands for an all-German commission in connection with an interim status for the city. Its main effort would be to establish, at least by implication, that the new agreement put a time limit on Allied rights of occupation, and thereby to lay the groundwork for further Communist advances at a later date.

16. Our chief reason for raising the possibility of such modifications in the Soviet position is the USSR's evident awareness of the risks of proceeding unilaterally toward its objectives in Berlin. Khrushchev's estimates of Western, and particularly US, reactions will be fully as important in determining Soviet policy as his own objectives and his appraisals of the USSR's bargaining advantages. The record of successively deferred showdowns since November 1958 suggests that Khrushchev may have come to feel that his original expectations were founded upon an underestimate of the importance which the US attaches to its position in Berlin, or, put another way, an overestimate of the ease with which he could exploit the USSR's growing military power at the bargaining table. Apart from these considerations of military risk, Khrushchev is also aware that any major unilateral action on his part would virtually foreclose for a considerable period the possibility of handling other issues with the West in any atmosphere except one of maximum hostility.

17. While the severity of the USSR's minimum demands will vary primarily according to its estimate of American intentions and Western unity, it is clear that Moscow sees no necessity to sacrifice anything of value in the bargaining on Berlin and Germany. We believe there is virtually no chance, for example, that the USSR would seriously consider proposals involving a change in the status of East Berlin or the establishment of a ground corridor between West Berlin and West Germany over which the GDR had no control.

18. There is also a close relationship between the advantages which the USSR would require in any settlement this year, and the length of time for which it would be prepared to underwrite this settlement. We believe that the Soviets will not accept any settlement which requires them to be satisfied with minor concessions unless it also offers them an opportunity to raise the issue again in the relatively near future. The USSR continues to believe that, although dangers are involved, its prospects for eventually absorbing West Berlin and legitimizing the GDR are good. And while the desire to avoid too sharp a deterioration in relations with the West may at various times put constraints upon its Berlin policy, we estimate that the USSR will not accept any long-term settlement which denies it the opportunity to work toward these goals.

19. Despite Soviet reluctance to move unilaterally, the USSR will take care to insure that the threat of such action is kept alive in the minds of its adversaries. And indeed, if negotiations do not take place, or if they fail, the USSR will have to consider whether to resort to further steps on its own. One possible move at the end of deadlocked negotiations

would be to remand the problem to further discussion at a lower level; Khrushchev might acquiesce in this as a means of avoiding a test of nerves and providing some appearance of continuing movement on the question. More likely, however, he would announce plans to convene a peace conference and, if the West still remained unwilling to make concessions, would finally sign a separate treaty with the GDR.

20. If events reached this point, the USSR would still have several ways of proceeding. It might transfer control over Allied access to the East Germans, who could sooner or later attempt, under Soviet guidance, to force the West into dealing with them. Alternatively, recent Soviet and East German statements suggest that the chief means of pressure following a separate peace treaty might be harassment of German access. This policy would be intended to force the West Berlin Government to give up its ties with Bonn, to clamp down on anti-GDR activities, and in this fashion gradually to submit to East German control. Such a course of action would allow the USSR to avoid for a time the issue of Allied rights, but it might be effective in undermining the independence of the city and the confidence of its population.

21. A policy of this sort, of course, need not wait upon a peace treaty. But we believe that the USSR will not permit its puppet regime to go very far in this direction until Khrushchev has explored the possibilities of extracting concessions from the new US Administration. In any event, Soviet policy during and beyond the next six months is likely to utilize a variety of such techniques to heighten periodically the pressure on Berlin, each time offering the possibility of new negotiations.