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The crisis over Berlin precipitated by Khrushchev on 10 November 1958 was the logical extension of the policies developed by the Soviet leaders following the Western decision in 1955 to accord full sovereignty to West Germany and bring it into the NATO alliance. Having failed to block these developments, Moscow adopted a new course aimed at gaining Western acceptance of the concept of two Germanys.

Its initial move in this direction was to establish diplomatic relations with Bonn in September 1955. The USSR then concluded a state treaty with Ulbricht's regime granting it all the attributes of sovereignty except control over Allied access to West Berlin. Next, Molotov at the Geneva foreign ministers' conference in November 1955 rejected reunification of Germany by means of free elections and declared that unification was possible only through a rapprochement between the two German states.

Thereafter the USSR took the position that a peace treaty should be negotiated with and signed by the two German states. Previously, the Soviets had said a treaty would be concluded with a reunified Germany. This new approach still left two significant issues unresolved: the status of Berlin and the conclusion of a final peace settlement. Therefore the final step in this policy was the crisis over Berlin and the Soviet demands for a peace treaty with East and West Germany and a "free city" in West Berlin.

Berlin Crisis: 1958-60

Khrushchev's aim was to confront the Western powers with the apparent dilemma of risking war to maintain their existing rights in Berlin or making concessions which would erode their position not only in Berlin but also on the question of German unification. In addition to using the Berlin threat as a lever for overcoming Western resistance to a summit meeting under conditions favorable to the USSR, Khrushchev's strategy was to manipulate the Berlin issue as a means of wringing concessions from the West which could lead eventually to some form of recognition of the East German regime and to acceptance of the status quo in Eastern Europe.

Since May 1959, when negotiations opened at the Geneva foreign ministers' conference, Khrushchev's fundamental goal has been not to drive Western forces out of Berlin within some brief period but to bring about a basic change in the legal status of the city. Such a change, in Moscow's view, would seriously undermine the Western powers' long-standing insistence that their rights in Berlin--based on the unconditional surrender of Germany--continue until Germany is reunified by four-power agreement.

The Soviet position, therefore, has consisted of two main elements: an offer to negotiate a modification in Berlin's status, and a threat to take unilateral action if no agreement is reached. Moscow's initial demand for the creation of a free city and all subsequent amendments, including a compromise solution for an interim period, have aimed at liquidating Western rights to remain in Berlin without restrictions pending German unification. Since the West has no interest in negotiating away its rights, Moscow has used deadlines, either explicit or implicit, to guarantee continuing Western interest in discussing the issue in order to avoid a crisis.

The breakdown of the summit conference in Paris confronted

Khrushchev with the choice of carrying out his threat against Berlin and accepting the high risks involved or deferring action until a further round of negotiations could be attempted with a new American administration. His choice of the latter course reflected not only his preference for a policy of limited risks but also his confidence that the forces which brought about the Paris meeting were still operative in the West.

Soviet restraint, however, did not preclude attempts by the East Germans to undermine the Western position in Berlin by imposing arbitrary restrictions on the movements of West Germans into East Berlin. In the face of West German economic retaliation, the Communists gradually retreated and accepted a compromise settlement of the issue, partly because of the potential economic disruption which would result from a break in trade but also because of Khrushchev's desire not to jeopardize the chances for an early meeting with the new President.

Khrushchev also used this period between the summit conference and the change of administrations to spell out his future course. He began to lay the groundwork for new high-level negotiations on Berlin in his discussion with Prime Minister Macmillan in New York last fall. He told the prime minister that the heads of government would have to discuss Germany and Berlin and that the Soviet Union would sign a treaty with East Germany if the West refused to reach agreement. He said that, in any case, the question of Germany must be settled during 1961. Khrushchev made this position public on 20 October and informed West German Ambassador Kroll that postponement of a solution beyond the West German elections, scheduled for this September, would be unacceptable.

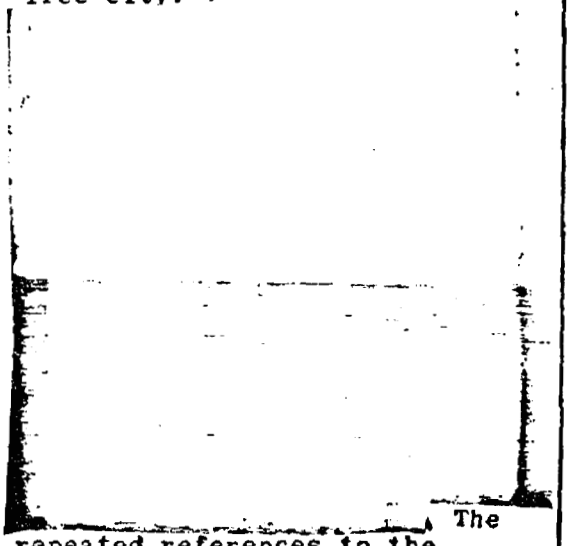
In a recent conversation with Kroll, Khrushchev modified his earlier timetable. While strongly emphasizing his determination to achieve a solution during 1961, Khrushchev stated that the bloc had set no precise deadlines and would be willing to wait until the West German elections and "possibly" until the Soviet party congress in October before convening a bloc peace conference to sign a separate treaty with East Germany. He said also that the prospects of a showdown over Berlin "need not affect negotiations already begun with the US" and that he was willing to give the President more time.

This line and Khrushchev's repeated assurances in his recent interview with Walter Lippmann that he recognized that the President needed time to consolidate his position suggest that Khrushchev's future course is still closely tied to his desire to hold a high-level meeting on Berlin, either bilaterally with the US or at another four-power summit conference. At the same time, these statements probably reflect the Soviet leaders' awareness that East-West negotiations on Berlin will require considerably more time than Khrushchev anticipated after the summit breakdown and in private conversations last winter.

The Soviet Position

The USSR's maximum demands have remained essentially unaltered since first spelled out in the notes of 27 November 1958 and 10 January 1959; they were most recently restated in Moscow's memorandum to Bonn on 17 February 1961. The USSR proposes to conclude a peace treaty with both German states and to transform West Berlin into a demilitarized free city. This position was modified slightly at the Geneva foreign ministers' conference, when Gromyko proposed that "symbolic" units of the four

powers could be stationed in the free city.



The repeated references to the necessity of confirming the postwar situation in Europe, although designed in part to present Soviet demands in a reasonable light, also reflect the Soviet leaders' preoccupation with firmly establishing the international position of the East European regimes through a treaty freezing the partition of Germany and recognizing the East German boundaries as permanent international frontiers.

Khrushchev is well aware that the growing strength of West Germany poses a serious political, economic, and military challenge to the Ulbricht regime and to the East European governments bordering on Germany. By demanding a peace treaty, a free city, and complete East German control over communications to Berlin, Khrushchev is seeking to deal a decisive blow to Bonn's aspirations for unification and to undermine its confidence in the strength and unity of the Western alliance.

In his talks with Lippmann, however, Khrushchev indicated that he does not hold any great expectations for Western acceptance of a peace treaty with both Germanys. Recent Soviet statements provide strong evidence that Moscow instead will concentrate on obtaining a temporary or interim solution for Berlin. The memorandum to Bonn stated as much, and Khrushchev told Lippmann that such an interim solution was a Soviet "fallback" position. Khrushchev made it clear, however, that the USSR would press for an agreement abolishing Western occupation rights at the end of the interim period. The revival of the interim concept, well in advance of any negotiations, suggests that Moscow sees this as the only proposal realistic enough to gain Western agreement.

The interim agreement as originally outlined at the Geneva foreign ministers' conference has three main advantages for the USSR: 1) a strictly defined time limit, which would permit Moscow to reopen the question with a stronger legal and political position; 2) the implication that the Western powers remained in Berlin at the sufferance of the USSR; and 3) the link between an interim agreement and the establishment of an all-German negotiating body. In effect, the Soviet leaders hoped to induce the West to accept a revision of Berlin's status in the direction of the free city proposals in return for permission to maintain troops in and to have free access to Berlin for a limited period.

At Geneva, Foreign Minister Gromyko refused to clarify the status of Western rights at the end of this period and proposed only that negotiations be resumed with "due regard" to the situation prevailing at that time. The interim agreement, therefore, was intended as a stage leading toward the ultimate withdrawal of Western forces from Berlin. This position was made clear shortly before the Paris summit meeting, when Moscow proposed in a note to De

Gaulle that the interim period last for two years, but that at the end of the period the four powers would be committed to sign a peace treaty and "take measures" to create a free city in West Berlin.

A constant element in all Soviet formulations for a temporary solution of Berlin's status has been the proposal to convene an all-German commission to negotiate on unification and a peace treaty while the interim agreement was in effect. Khrushchev has privately conceded that he realized that such negotiations would probably fail, but the USSR has insisted on this proposal as a means of gaining Western endorsement of the thesis of two sovereign German states and their exclusive right to deal with unification.

The other points of an interim agreement--duration, abolition of propaganda activities, prohibition of nuclear weapons in West Berlin, and reduction of Western troops--are essentially bargaining counters. East German statements have listed various terms for "normalizing" the situation, including cessation of recruitment in West Berlin for the West German forces, termination of the West German Government's official activities there, and a "progressive reduction" of Western forces. As to the duration, Khrushchev is quoted by Lippmann as mentioning "perhaps two to three years," which could mean an extension of the last formal proposal--before the Paris summit--for a two-year agreement.

Conclusions

Despite Khrushchev's repeated expressions of skepticism regarding the West's willingness to resort to a nuclear war over Berlin, his actions during the past two and a half years suggest that a margin of doubt exists in his estimate of the Western response in a crisis, and that he still prefers a negotiated solution. Recent Soviet statements stressing the urgency of the German question suggest that a formal demarche to renew negotiations may be made in the relatively near future. Khrushchev probably would contend that the Western powers, after the abortive summit conference, committed themselves to reconvene the meeting and would cite his conversation with Macmillan as proof.

In any negotiations which take place in the next few months, Moscow might reduce some of its demands for an interim settlement rather than allow the talks to collapse. The main purpose of a limited agreement, however, would still be to document the Soviet contention that existing Allied rights are void and to establish the presumption that further steps would be taken to adjust the status of West Berlin.

If the West refused to negotiate, Khrushchev would probably feel compelled to conclude a separate treaty. His long and continuing commitments to take this action probably act as a form of pressure either to demonstrate gains by negotiations or to carry out his repeated pledges to resolve the situation in Berlin by unilateral action. At any rate, Khrushchev has committed himself to a solution during 1961.

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