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This document consists of 1 pages
Number 1 of 1 copies, Series H

18670

11-2061

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Memorandum of Conversation

Approved in White House
12/1/61

1961 DEC 1

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FPC/HDR by 10 24 94-12-11
DATE: November 20, 1961
Withdrawal No. 139-2

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SUBJECT: Berlin

OFFICE OF DIRECTOR
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The United States:

PARTICIPANTS:

The President
Mr. William R. Tyler,
Act. Asst. Sec. for EUR
Mr. E.S.Glenn, LS

Belgium:

Foreign Minister Paul Henri
Spaak
Ambassador Louis Scheyven
Mr. Rothschild

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After greetings by the President and a reply by Mr. Spaak, the Foreign Minister said he would like to present his ideas about the Berlin situation. He expressed the fear that the West might be placed in a very difficult position if it does not take some action. The signing of a peace treaty with the GDR by the Soviets and the transfer to the GDR of the Soviet powers of control over access to Berlin would place the West in grave difficulties, especially if the GDR decided not to change anything factually in the present procedures, or at least, if the GDR decided not to change those procedures at first. In consequence, the West ought to seek negotiations on Berlin. At this point a question arises whether to make it a broad negotiation, bearing on the German problem in its generality, or whether to restrict the scope of the negotiations to Berlin only. The first possibility should be viewed unfavorably as nothing good can come out of a negotiation in which the differences between the two sides are too great to be bridged. The Soviets would undoubtedly insist on signing a peace treaty with both Germanies, whereas the West would want to see German unification on the basis of self-determination. The West would have to stand firm on its position since the signing of a peace treaty with the GDR

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would amount to its recognition. Thus the scope of the negotiations should be limited to Berlin alone.

In the latter respect, two things have to be clearly defined: (1) the points on which the West is decided to stand firm; and (2) the tactics to be adopted. In the first category may be mentioned the freedom of the Berliners to choose their own institutions, the freedom of access to Berlin with guarantees to that effect, and also the possibility of making Berlin economically viable.

The President asked about the extent of the ties of Berlin to West Germany which Mr. Spaak considers necessary.

The Foreign Minister replied that it may be extremely difficult to obtain complete political integration but that economic integration is a necessity.

As to the question of tactics, it might, for example, be possible to press for such political ties saying that since the Soviets have given over East Berlin to the GDR it is only natural that we should want to include West Berlin in the free world area; insistence on such a point, however, is not necessary. One of the difficulties of the West is that its position is too well known, and it is difficult to negotiate if one tells the opponent beforehand what the points are on which one will stand firm and what other points are negotiable. Nevertheless, a basis for negotiation exists and although success cannot be guaranteed, negotiation should be sought.

There exist certain difficulties on the West German side. For example, the Chancellor has in the past wanted to direct negotiations toward a broad approach to the entire German problem; moreover, he was not the only one to deem this necessary. However, as the President may know, Mr. Spaak had conversations recently with the German Socialists, who now understand that giving too much scope to the negotiations would have unfavorable effects and

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will now agree that negotiations should be restricted to Berlin. It is, of course, very difficult for West Germany to take a clear position in respect to negotiations and to provide leadership in the determination of the Western position. It may however be hoped that, in spite of their internal political difficulties, the Germans will not oppose a stand determined upon by the other Western powers. In the conversations with the German Socialists, the latter agreed that the important things were the necessity of close economic ties between West Berlin and West Germany and the freedom of access to West Berlin; it is possible that this point of view will now be acceptable also to the Chancellor.

Mr. Spaak said that, as the President probably knew, he had been in Moscow recently and had spoken to Chairman Khrushchev. The latter said that he would not oppose the idea of an agreement on Berlin to be arrived at by the West and the Soviet Union and to be incorporated into the Soviet peace treaty with the GDR. Such an arrangement strikes the Foreign Minister as being favorable, since it would avoid any recognition of the GDR on our part, and would continue a measure of Soviet responsibility. Such an agreement might constitute an obligation imposed upon the GDR by its treaty with the Soviet Union.

The President asked whether Chairman Khrushchev did not make the participation of Soviet troops in the garrisoning of West Berlin a condition of such an agreement.

Mr. Spaak said that this was not quite the case. Khrushchev had said that something of the sort might be necessary to make it possible for the Soviets to guarantee the application of the agreement. He had indicated also other possibilities, such as garrisoning by neutral troops or by the United Nations; if the West wishes to have its troops in West Berlin then the Soviets would want to have theirs also. This, however, may not be a firm position on the part of the Soviet Union but perhaps one of those items which are negotiable.

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The President said that there were two immediate aspects to this question. First, that of the manner in which the negotiations should be conducted. Second, and even more urgent, an agreement on a common position on the part of the West. There are some difficulties on the West German side. There is also the position of General de Gaulle who refuses to negotiate under duress. Even though the Soviets have removed their deadline, the pressure on their part still amounts to duress and the French are unwilling to negotiate. There is nevertheless some hope that General de Gaulle will come closer to the position of the other Allies. Could Mr. Spaak comment on the position of the other members of NATO? Couldn't an expression of opinion on the part of the latter bring about a change in the positions of France and West Germany?

The Foreign Minister said there already has occurred some change in the West German position. It is rumored that at the present moment the Chancellor is ready to accept the point of view described above. There are people who have heard him say that he had wanted to remain in power because he is the only man who could take a more conciliatory stand as he himself has no political future. He could thus leave the slate clear for his successor. Naturally, the present position of the Chancellor is not well known to Mr. Spaak. The more so because the part to be played by the new party in the German Governmental coalition is not known. In any case, Mr. Spaak repeated that one cannot expect initiatives to come from the Germans, but there is a possibility that they would follow the other Western Allies. If there is no change in the previously voiced German position, then all that can be expected is a clash between our refusal to recognize the GDR and the Soviet refusal to accept the principle of self-determination, that is to say an impasse. On the other hand, if we obtain freedom for the Berliners to choose their own institutions, and the freedom of access to Berlin, and the possibility of giving economic aid to West Berlin, then the situation will not be too bad. We may ask ourselves also what will happen if we do nothing. In that case, the situation will

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become more and more dangerous, and the Soviets, if they are clever, will simply transfer their occupation rights to the GDR and thus place the West in an exceedingly difficult position.

In reply to a question by the President, the Foreign Minister said that their difficulties would be mainly due to the fact that the people of Europe would not consider the simple fact that traffic control has been transferred to the GDR as a sufficient reason for the use of force. There is also another reason for acting rapidly. Not only is there a danger that the Soviets will do precisely what Mr. Spaak fears but also the worry of the West Berliners about their future may precipitate a mass exodus of West Berliners to West Germany and thus weaken the West's position. It is in the best interest of the West to obtain a stabilization of the present position through an accord.

The President said that the US is pushing in the direction of such a negotiation. However, it is difficult for the US to do much about a European question against the opposition of both France and West Germany. The position of West Germany, of course, is liable to change.

Mr. Spaak said that in those circumstances the French would also probably change their stand. If they do not, the US, the UK and the other NATO powers should move ahead without them.

The President said that the West German position was a key to the entire situation. Mr. Spaak said that there was another trump card that could also be used and that was NATO itself. It seems all of the NATO powers except West Germany and France are in favor of negotiation and seems their interests were affected by the situation.

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The President said that it would be helpful if the other NATO powers were to have their voices heard on the question. Once again it is difficult for the US to do anything about a European question against French and German opposition and with silence on the part of the other European members of NATO. An initiative on the part of the latter would certainly be welcomed.

Mr. Spaak said such an initiative had in fact been taken already. There had been "a kind of vote" in the NATO Council. France and West Germany were opposed to negotiation, the other two great powers abstained so as not to go against the French and Germans, but the majority was in favor of negotiations.

The President said that a repetition of such an expression of opinion might be useful at the present moment as all of the members of NATO are directly concerned with the situation in Berlin. There is still another point however; what will be the attitude of the Soviets if the West decides to negotiate? Mr. Gromyko had said that the Soviets would agree to guarantee the situation of West Berlin, but only against a number of unacceptable conditions, such as the presence of Soviet troops in West Berlin, the guarantee of not only the eastern but also the western borders of the GDR, respect of the sovereignty of the GDR, and so on. In other words, his position was about the same as the Soviet position had been in Vienna. The President is therefore not too optimistic about the willingness of the Soviets to negotiate. The more so in that he does not see what advantage the Soviets can derive from negotiating on a basis such as the one outlined earlier.

Mr. Spaak said that the West might push the Soviets by opposing demands of its own, such as a negotiation about all of Berlin, saying if the Soviets have taken

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over the Eastern part then we are entitled to take over the Western one, the destruction of the wall, etc. There is, of course, no guarantee of success. But the West should try because, at the very least, it will strengthen its psychological position in Europe if it shows that it has taken a reasonable stand which was rejected by the Soviets. There is still also another reason; the Soviets, no more than the West, want to go to war about Berlin. Therefore, an attempt should be made. Of course, there is no question of recognizing the Western border of East Germany as this would amount to a recognition of the GDR. As for the question of respecting its sovereignty, this is somewhat vague and could have its meaning determined in the negotiations.

The President expressed his basic agreement while underscoring his doubts as to the willingness of the Soviets to come to terms.

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