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CRISIS OVER BERLIN

American Policy Concerning the Soviet Threats to Berlin,
November 1958-December 1962

Part V

Developments in the Early Phase of the Kennedy Administration
and the Meeting with Khrushchev at Vienna,
January-June 1961

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FOREWORD

This is Part V of a comprehensive study, to be issued in eight parts, which, when completed, will cover American policy concerning the Soviet threats to Berlin, November 1958-December 1962. Each part is separately bound. Also separately bound is an introduction which covers in broad sweep the developments between the final phase of World War II and the outbreak of the Berlin crisis in November 1958.

The study was requested by Martin J. Hillenbrand for the Berlin Task Force and the Bureau of European Affairs. The research and writing were done by Arthur G. Kogan.

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Chapter I

EVOLUTION OF KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION POLICIES ON BERLIN,
JANUARY-MARCH 1961

A. Soviet-American Relations and the Berlin Problem

1. Soviet and American Positions on Berlin

When the new American administration of President John F. Kennedy took office on January 20, 1961, hardly anybody doubted that the United States and its allies were still confronted by the same crisis over Berlin that had originated with Khrushchev's ultimatum of November 1958. To be sure, tensions over Berlin had somewhat eased at the end of 1960 when East German harassments against Berlin met with failure as a result of successful Western countermeasures. Moreover, Khrushchev, who after the collapse of the summit conference in May 1960 had clearly indicated his lack of interest in negotiating outstanding issues with the Eisenhower administration, expressed in a message to the new American President the hope for a "fundamental improvement" in Soviet-American relations and in the world situation as a whole.¹ Despite these expressions of good will, however, there was little indication that Soviet policy on those issues which could lead to the sharpest conflict with the Western Powers had basically changed. Barely two weeks before the coming into office of the Kennedy administration, Khrushchev on January 6, 1961, not only enunciated the doctrine of Soviet support for so-called national wars of liberation but also emphasized once again that the Western Powers were in a "particularly vulnerable" position in West Berlin and would have to end their "occupational regime" in that city.² Even more significant was the fact that the fundamental Soviet position on Germany and Berlin was re-asserted in a memorandum handed to the German Federal Government on February 17.

¹Department of State Bulletin, Feb. 13, 1961, pp. 214-215.

²"Analysis of the Khrushchev speech of January 6, 1961: Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate" (Sen. Doc. 46, 87th Cong., 1st sess., Aug. 24, 1961), pp. 42-78.

Soviet Memorandum of February 17 to the Federal Republic and the American Attitude. In this memorandum the Soviet Union stated that it did not rule out the possibility of an interim settlement on Berlin pending conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany but only with a strictly specific time limit fixed in advance. If no peace treaty with the two German states was concluded within the agreed time limit, the Soviet Union would sign a peace treaty with the GDR which would mean "ending the occupation regime in West Berlin with all the attending consequences", particularly with regard to communications "by land, water, and air".¹

The new American administration did not rush into making any strong public statements on the subject of Berlin. Actually, the fact that the Berlin problem was not mentioned in President Kennedy's State of the Union address caused some German uneasiness which was brought to the attention of Under Secretary of State Chester Bowles by the German Ambassador on February 2. The Under Secretary assured the Ambassador that there was no cause for worry on this point.²

The reasons for American reticence on this subject were explained by the President himself to West German Foreign Minister Brentano on February 17 when Brentano visited Washington. The President stated that the silence which his administration had maintained with regard to Berlin did not indicate any lessening of American interest in Berlin. But he emphasized that as long as there was a lull he did not want to provoke either action or comment in the matter. Similarly, President Kennedy told West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt, who called on him on March 13, that his administration had not said much about Berlin because he felt that it would be better if any challenge with respect to Berlin were launched by Khrushchev.³ The determination of the United States to preserve the freedom of West Berlin was confirmed, however, in the joint communiqué issued at the conclusion of

¹Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 635-641.

²Memorandum by Hillenbrand (GER) of conversation between Bowles, Grewe, and others, Feb. 2, 1961, confidential.

³Memorandum by Kohler (EUR) and Lejins, (LS) of conversation between the President and Brentano, Feb. 17, 1961, secret; memorandum by Kohler (EUR) of conversation between the President and Brandt, Mar. 13, confidential.

Foreign Minister Brentano's meeting with the President on February 17 and was reemphasized in remarks made by Secretary Rusk in his press conference on March 9 and in a statement issued by Brandt following his conversation with the President on March 13.¹

Soviet-American Exchanges. Although the new American administration, as has been shown, was not eager to initiate discussions with the Soviet Union regarding Berlin, it had to expect that the Berlin issue might be raised by the Soviet Union itself. Instructions sent by the Department to the Embassy at Moscow on February 28 provided guidance in the event that this should happen.

According to these instructions, the Embassy should take no initiative in raising the subject of Germany and Berlin. But if Khrushchev should do so "within the established pattern of the Soviet position", a reply should be made along these lines: The new administration recognized that the entire situation with respect to Germany and Berlin was unsatisfactory to everybody concerned. The central difficulty was the continued division of Germany, and it was the belief of the United States that there would be no real tranquillity in Central Europe until the Germans were allowed to unite. The United States recognized, however, that German unity could not be achieved in the near future. It was therefore necessary to deal with this abnormal situation, although the abnormality stemmed from the situation in Germany as a whole and could not be attributed "to one element thereof such as West Berlin". But to change the existing status of West Berlin into that of a free city or a similar scheme would merely "increase the abnormality of an already abnormal situation".

It was further pointed out in these instructions that the United States, while it could not prevent the Soviet Union from signing a separate peace treaty with the GDR, would publicly oppose such a treaty that would confirm the division of Germany. But the United States and its allies were mostly concerned about the effects of such a treaty on their position in Berlin. However, if arrangements "similar to the Bolz-Zorin exchange of

¹Joint United States-West German communiqué, Feb. 17, 1961; Department of State press release 122, Mar. 9; statement of Mayor Willy Brandt, Mar. 13.

letters¹ were still continued in effect, we could try to make necessary adjustments." Finally, the instruction emphasized that, since the West had made proposals in the past which were rejected by the Soviet Union, the United States after consultations with its allies, would put forward its ideas in due course. But Khrushchev should understand that the United States could not contemplate anything that would "represent material change for the worse in the Western position in that city or access thereto."²

Replying to this instruction on March 1, Ambassador Thompson raised the question whether it would really be advisable to indicate to the Soviet Union Western willingness to live with a separate peace treaty between the USSR and the GDR provided an arrangement of the type of the Bolz-Zorin exchange of letters continued. Thompson felt that this, in effect, would be telling the Soviet Union that the United States would not oppose seriously a separate treaty provided its own interests were protected, regardless of the effect this would have on West Germany. Thompson therefore proposed that he be authorized to cover this matter merely by asking why the Soviet Union insisted that a separate treaty would have to be drawn up in such a way that it would end Western rights of occupation. The Department immediately agreed with Thompson's suggestion.³

Thompson had occasion to present the American position on Germany and Berlin to Premier Khrushchev on March 9 when he handed him a letter from President Kennedy dated February 22. In his letter the President expressed the hope that he could meet personally with Khrushchev before long for an informal exchange of views, and he suggested that the question of such a meeting should be taken up with Ambassador Thompson, who would

¹See ante, Introduction, p. 10.

²To Moscow, tel. 1402, Feb. 28, 1961, secret.

³From Moscow, tel. 2045, and to Moscow, tel. 1410, both Mar. 1, 1961, confidential.

also be in a position to inform Khrushchev of the President's thinking on a number of international issues.¹

In the course of the discussion with Ambassador Thompson, Khrushchev stated that the Soviet Union had most recently put forward its position on Germany in the memorandum handed to the Federal Republic on February 17. After restating the familiar Soviet views on this subject, Khrushchev declared that both sides wanted a unified Germany but that it was unrealistic to conceive of a unified Germany either under Adenauer or under Ulbricht. Therefore, a peace treaty should be concluded with the "two Germanies", and the Soviet Union was willing to have a provision inserted guaranteeing to the people of West Berlin the political system of their own choice. He also emphasized that the existing borders between the Federal Republic, the GDR, Poland, and Czechoslovakia needed the legal foundation which only a peace treaty could provide. The Soviet Premier denied the existence of any expansionism on the part of the "socialist camp" and stressed his desire to improve and not to worsen the relations between the Soviet Union and the United States.

Thompson told Khrushchev that the President was reviewing American policy on Germany and would discuss it with Adenauer and the other allies. But he pointed out that it would be difficult to visualize any basic policy changes. He then inquired whether the special clause in the German peace treaty to which Khrushchev had referred might not also provide for continuation of the existing situation in Berlin. Khrushchev then suggested a joint approach in working out a status for Berlin. This status could be registered with the United Nations; there could be a joint police force (presumably of the four powers) or a symbolic force of the four powers in West Berlin. Khrushchev made it clear that this would not include East Berlin which was the capital of the GDR.

Khrushchev also promised that no threat against West Berlin from any side would be permitted and that this should assure the United States that its prestige would not suffer. In reply to a question by Thompson, Khrushchev declared that Ulbricht would also sign a commitment made with regard to West Berlin.

¹Letter, Kennedy to Khrushchev, Feb. 22, 1961, presidential handling/secret.

After Ambassador Thompson had set forth in more detail the American position as expressed in the Department's instruction of February 28, Khrushchev stated once more that a treaty signed by him and President Kennedy would represent a great step forward in Soviet-American relations. If a treaty were signed it could be implemented by steps including a gradual withdrawal of American and Soviet troops from Germany. But if no treaty were signed the troops of the two countries would continue to confront each other and the situation would be that of an armistice rather than of peace.¹

2. Western Reaction to the Soviet Memorandum of February 17

Despite Khrushchev's outwardly more accomodating attitude in the conversation with Ambassador Thompson and the "general absence of rancor" in these discussions, which was noted by the Department in an instruction to the United States Mission to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and European Regional Organizations (USRO),² the Soviet Premier's statement that the Soviet position had been set forth in the memorandum of February 17 to the Federal Republic indicated that there had been no basic change in that position which would hold out prospects for fruitful negotiations. The Four Power Working Group on Germany and Berlin, which discussed the Soviet memorandum in its meeting of March 8, reached a consensus on the following characterization of the Soviet memorandum:

1) A restatement of the standard Soviet position on a peace treaty, Germany, and Berlin.

2) A move to build up early pressure for progress--along Soviet lines--with respect to the problems of Germany and Berlin.

3) A possible attempt to engage the Federal Republic in bilateral talks with the aim of driving a wedge between the Government of the Federal Republic and its allies, or at least of sewing confusion, and weakening the concept of quadripartite responsibility.

¹From Moscow, tel. 2147, Mar. 10, 1961, confidential.

²To Paris, tel. TOPOL 1272, Mar. 13, 1961, secret.

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This evaluation by the Working Group was endorsed by Secretary Rusk and submitted to President Kennedy on March 10.¹

During the following weeks the Working Group attempted to reach agreement on the text of a West German reply to the Soviet memorandum. Although substantial agreement was achieved in meetings of the Working Group held on March 17, April 7, and May 2, some differences regarding the text and the question of the timing of the reply remained to be settled. The issue was also taken up at the Oslo meeting of the NATO Foreign Ministers.

By early June the issue of a reply to the Soviet memorandum of February 17 had become greatly overshadowed by the President's meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna. Therefore, the Working Group agreed in a meeting of June 2 that it would delay the decision regarding the time of delivery of the reply and any changes in the text made necessary as a result of the Vienna meeting. The Federal Republic's reply was finally delivered on June 12.²

B. Review of the Berlin Problem by the US Government

1. Proposals by the Department of State

While the United States, in public as well as in diplomatic exchanges, indicated a reluctance to come forward with a new initiative regarding Berlin, a most thorough review of the Berlin problem and its political and military aspects was being carried on within the United States Government.

On February 27 McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President, confirmed assignment to the Department, on an urgent basis, of the task of preparing a report to the President on the problem of Berlin which should deal with the "political and military aspects of the Berlin crisis" and should also contain a position on Germany for possible Four Power negotiations".³

¹To Bonn, airgram CG-792, Mar. 9, 1961, secret; memorandum from the Secretary to the President, Mar. 10, secret.

²Memorandum by Fritts (GER) of meetings of Four Power Working Group on Germany Including Berlin, Mar. 17, Apr. 7; May 2; and June 2, 1961, all secret; for text of the reply, see Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 678-681. See also post, Part VI, chapter I, p. 2.

³Memorandum by McGhee (S/P) to Kohler (EUR), Feb. 27, 1961, secret.

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A very detailed draft with several annexes and attachments, such as "The Berlin Crisis since November 1958," "Possible All-German Context for Berlin Solution," "Discussion of Berlin in Isolation," was completed on March 23. A "streamlined version" without the annexes was approved by Assistant Secretary for European Affairs Foy Kohler on March 30 for transmittal to the White House. The principal conclusions of this report were as follows:

- 1) The particular course of action open to the West with regard to Berlin is strictly limited, and there is little reason to think that a lasting settlement acceptable to both East and West can be devised.
- 2) The maintenance of a credible deterrent against unilateral Soviet action is a vital component of the Western position. Without it, "the full geographic weakness of the Western position in Berlin will have decisive weight in any negotiation." The possibility of developing deterrents other than the "pure threat" of atomic war should be considered.
- 3) While further thought should be given to providing some all-German "sweetening" for continuing discussion of the Berlin question with the Soviet Union, it is unlikely that any real step toward German reunification can be achieved within the calculable future under circumstances acceptable to the West. It also seems questionable that any all-German approach acceptable to the West will alone suffice to provide a basis for even a temporary solution of the Berlin problem.
- 4) The Western Powers must therefore expect that in future negotiations with the Soviet Union they will again be forced to discuss the question of Berlin in isolation. It seems unlikely that any one of a number of possible proposals for a Berlin arrangement will be negotiable with the Soviet Union or, if negotiable, acceptable to the West.
- 5) In certain circumstances the Western Powers might find it desirable to aim at a limited arrangement involving stabilization of existing access

procedures, allowing for a certain role by the East Germans but preserving the essentials of the Western position, along the lines of Solution C of the London Working Group Report of April 1959 (see ante, Part I, chapter III, section H). Ultimately the Western Powers might find it necessary to contemplate the execution of their contingency plans.

6) While the present Western contingency plans constitute a "highly articulated system of related stages", one must realistically expect the intrusion of unpredictable factors as well as possible efforts by the allies, particularly the British, to reopen under crisis conditions certain aspects of contingency planning such as the documentation procedures to be followed by the Western Powers.¹

2. Studies Undertaken by Former Secretary Acheson

The memorandum by the Office of German Affairs described above had gone into some detail on the subject of Berlin contingency planning, not only with regard to the planning done so far, but also in terms of its underlying assumptions and of the related problem of the credibility of the Western deterrent, somewhat along the line of questions which Hillenbrand had raised in his memorandum of September 14, 1960 (see ante, Part IV, chapter IV). These questions relating to the assumptions of contingency planning and the credibility of the deterrent played also a central part in several significant studies of certain aspects of the Berlin problem undertaken at the President's request by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson.

Soon after coming into office President Kennedy asked the former Secretary of State to help in the formulation of American policies with regard to some foreign policy problems, especially in the field of NATO affairs. The President had also asked Acheson to devote himself particularly to certain aspects of the Berlin problem and to put forward recommendations which

¹Memorandum by Hillenbrand (GER), "The Problem of Berlin," Mar. 23, 1961, secret; undated minute from Hillenbrand (GER) to Kohler (EUR), forwarding memorandum, "The Problem of Berlin," Mar. 30, secret.

would form the basis for more specific studies by the Government departments concerned. Accordingly, Acheson submitted to the President between April and July 1961 several studies on the Berlin problem. In submitting his first report of April 3, Acheson made it clear that it was in the nature of a provisional paper setting forth certain premises for studies which the Departments of State and Defense had already been asked to supply.¹ As Acheson had the opportunity to present the essential conclusions of this early study in the course of the conversations between the President and British Prime Minister Macmillan on April 24, they will be taken up in the context of those meetings.

3. Other Planning Relating to Berlin

Apart from the studies discussed above, considerable work relating to the Berlin problem was in progress in the first few months of 1961. In an earlier section of this study mention has already been made of developments in the field of contingency planning which were carried over into the early part of 1961. This was the case particularly with regard to tripartite planning of non-military countermeasures against obstruction of allied access to Berlin and to quadripartite planning of economic countermeasures against interference with civilian access.

Also, in addition to the studies drawn up in the Office of German Affairs and by former Secretary Acheson, a paper was produced by the Policy Planning Staff suggesting a "new approach" to the problems of Germany and Europe and was discussed in a small working group within the Department of State. This study characterized the Western Peace Plan of 1959 as obsolescent and American policy with respect to Germany as basically defensive, and it warned against resting the hopes for peace in Europe on a perpetuation of the status quo. The paper suggested certain elements of new policies "in terms of realistic possibilities for negotiating a German-European settlement." The suggestions included: a tacit freeze on the status of Berlin; Western approval of the "present provisional eastern boundaries of Germany, subject only to minor adjustments;" support for an active policy by the Federal Republic toward Eastern Europe expressed in non-aggression pacts with the countries of Eastern Europe and the Balkans,

¹Memorandum from Acheson to the President on the subject of Berlin, Apr. 3, 1961, top secret.

cultural contacts with them, and compensation for Eastern European victims of Nazi persecution; encouragement of closer relations between the Federal Republic and the GDR in the technical, economic, and cultural fields, which would eventually reach the political level, with the possibility of "at least de facto, possibly eventually de jure recognition of the GDR by the West" although not to the prejudice of ultimate German reunification; progress toward the political reunification of Germany paralleled by measures to establish a Central European security zone which might extend equally far, east, and west from the existing line of division; finally, a united Germany that might be an armed neutral or a confederation of two neutral states, since exclusion of a united Germany from the NATO and Warsaw Pacts would be a necessary condition for Soviet-Western agreement on reunification.¹

Furthermore, at the request of the President, the Department of Defense undertook certain studies on the basis of the recommendations put forward by Acheson. These studies were to determine 1) the likely military course and the effects of the use of substantial non-nuclear ground forces to open ground access to Berlin; 2) the likely military course and the effects of a substantial non-nuclear effort to reopen and maintain air access to Berlin; 3) the military actions such as naval blockade and air harassment which might be undertaken in areas other than Central Europe to apply pressure on the Soviet Union for reopening of access to Berlin.

In accordance with the President's request, Secretary of Defense McNamara sent to McGeorge Bundy, Special Assistant to the President, a study by the Joint Chiefs of Staff of April 28, together with a memorandum to the President in which McNamara summarized his conclusions from this study by the Joint Chiefs. These were to the effect that substantial rather than limited non-nuclear action to reopen ground access must be planned; that non-nuclear actions to reopen air access would not be successful without an expansion of the conflict, and even then would not succeed in restoring air access in the face of determined Soviet opposition; that there was available to the West a wide range of world-wide action to put effective pressure on the Soviet Bloc in the event of another Berlin crisis.

¹Unsigned memorandum by S/P, "A New Approach to the German-European Problem," Apr. 10, confidential.

McNamara also stated that the studies by the Joint Chiefs had reinforced his opinion that current contingency planning was deficient in not making use of the military potential of the Federal Republic and that he believed that German participation in military action over Berlin should be accepted.¹

Apart from these internal American discussions and studies relating to the Berlin problem, there were, of course, discussions with the allies in this matter. The first significant exchanges of this type under the Kennedy Administration were the British-American talks at the beginning of April 1961.

¹Memorandum from Bundy (White House) to the Secretary of Defense, Apr. 17, 1961, top secret; memorandum from McNamara (Defense) to Bundy, May 5, enclosing memorandum from McNamara to the President, May 5, and memorandum JCSM-287-61 from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Secretary of Defense, April 28; all top secret.

Chapter II

DISCUSSION OF THE BERLIN PROBLEM BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES
AND ITS ALLIES, APRIL-MAY 1961

A. British-American Talks

1. Rusk-Home Conversation, April 4

The visit to Washington of Prime Minister Macmillan and Foreign Secretary Home at the beginning of April 1961 afforded an opportunity for talks on Berlin between the British leaders and the new American administration. A preliminary exchange of views among Secretary Rusk, Lord Home, and their advisers took place on April 4. The principal topic of discussion was the possibility of a separate treaty between the Soviet Union and the East Germans.

Lord Home raised the question whether the Western Powers would really be in weaker position if their rights were put down in a treaty, and he asserted in this connection that the argument based on the right of conquest with respect to Berlin was "growing somewhat thin". He therefore suggested that the West consider the possibility of a treaty signed between the four occupying powers. The British Foreign Secretary described his suggestion as an alternative to fighting because, he said, a solution must be found unless the Western Powers were prepared to fight a nuclear war. Home felt that Khrushchev really did not want to hand over the controls over access to Berlin to the GDR and that such a treaty between the four powers would take him off the hook.

Secretary Rusk stated that if the Russians concluded a peace treaty with the East Germans the United States would simply not recognize it. But, unless some action were taken against the Western Powers on the ground, no danger was likely to arise. As far as the basis of the Western position was concerned, the Secretary agreed in part with Home, in the view that the right of conquest should not be stressed too much. The Secretary suggested that the three Western Powers might simply state that they were going to stay in Berlin until the German question was solved and that they would not be pushed out of Berlin. Such a position would avoid arguments on technicalities.

There was some discussion of the likely effects of an assumption of controls over access by the East Germans and about the relative advantages of dealing in this matter with the Soviet Union rather than with the East Germans. Home repeatedly expressed his preference for the former alternative since dealing with the East Germans over a period of several years might push the West more and more into recognition of the East German regime.

After the British suggested that the study of various possibilities of contingency planning should be continued, the United States pointed out that work was then in progress regarding non-military countermeasures against interference with access to Berlin but that some countries, including the United Kingdom, lacked the necessary legislative basis for the application of certain economic countermeasures. The British declared that this matter was being looked into.¹

2. Kennedy-Macmillan Conversation, April 5

Acheson's Presentation. A most significant exchange of views on the Berlin problem took place at the meeting among the President, Prime Minister Macmillan, and their advisers on April 5. At the President's request the discussion opened with a presentation of the issue by former Secretary of State Acheson.

Acheson stated initially that the President had drafted him to get some studies on the Berlin problem started. He had not yet reached any definite conclusions but was prepared to set forth some "rough" conclusions.

Acheson declared that he approached the problem with certain "semi-premises" such as the following:

1) There was no satisfactory solution to the Berlin problem apart from a solution of the German problem, which, however, did not seem likely in the immediate future.

2) The Soviet Union could be expected to press the Berlin issue in the course of the year.

¹Memorandum by Burdett (BNA) of conversation among the Secretary, Lord Home, and others, Apr. 4, 1961, secret.

3) There was no solution that would not weaken the Western position. Moreover, the same issues would confront the West under less favorable circumstances, and he could not see any proposals regarding Germany as a whole that would put the West in a more favorable position than the existing one.

After setting forth these premises, Acheson declared that the West must face the issue and prepare now for the eventualities that might arise. The importance of Berlin was very great, and this was the reason why the Soviet Union pressed the issue. If the West should fail this test, Germany would be pried loose from the alliance with the West.

Political and economic preparations, Acheson continued, were not adequate. There had to be some sort of military response. But such a military response should not be made over purely formal matters such as the stamping of papers but rather over substantial interference with civilian or military access to Berlin. There were three ways of responding, in the air, on the ground, and by threat of nuclear action. The last one would be unwise and reckless and, moreover, would not be believed. Thus, it became a question of engaging in ground or air operations.

The core of Acheson's argument was that the Western Powers were not capable of forcing access to Berlin against determined Soviet opposition and that what was really needed was to have a test of will. The purpose of such a test would be to make it clear to the Soviet Union that Western interest in access was more important than Soviet interest in preventing access and that Berlin was vital to the Western Powers but not to the Soviet Union.

As a result of technical developments that had occurred since the blockade of 1948-1949, particularly with respect to ground-to-air missiles, such a test of will could no longer take place in the air, because the Russians would simply shoot down the planes with their rockets. On the ground, however, it would be possible to "raise some ugly questions for the Russians" and to demonstrate to them that it was not worthwhile "to stop a really stout Western effort." But such an effort required a military force larger than a small batallion or a brigade, namely, a division with another division in support. If such a division encountered a superior Soviet force it would still be able to get back; and if East German divisions should be employed

against the Western force this division would be able to take care of them. There would be no resort to nuclear weapons, and the Western Powers would have tested whether the Soviet Union was really firm with regard to Berlin. If the Russians repulsed the attempt to force access to Berlin, there would be a general realization of the need to increase defense efforts as was the case in the Korean war. Acheson stated in conclusion that the President had not yet considered these ideas which he had presented.

Discussion. The President confirmed that he had not yet come to a conclusion on what was to be done, except on one point, namely, that the state of planning for these contingencies was not adequate. The tests proposed so far did not "escalate the matter to a sufficient height."

Prime Minister Macmillan declared that Acheson's statement that he regarded the stoppage of military or civilian supplies to Berlin as the test represented a tremendous advance in the American position. He himself had never thought that the British people would go to war over the question of who stamped a document.

Home expressed the view that a certain amount of planning in these fields was being carried out, and he referred to a plan favored by General Norstad for action on the ground and to the plans for a garrison air lift and a civilian air lift. Acheson remarked that the plans were limited by what the planners were authorized to do. Secretary of Defense McNamara declared that the Western Powers were ill prepared to carry out a probe.

Home also expressed some doubt regarding the advisability of sending in a division and referred to the possibility that the division might be cut off if bridges were blown up. Acheson declared that this danger could not arise until the Elbe River was reached.

Referring to criticism that contingency planning was being developed without commitment to carry it out, the President stated that the Western Powers must make some commitments in addition to planning. In this connection, he asked whether the British thought that a probe on the ground was too hazardous. The President also wondered whether the West should react to the conclusion of a separate peace treaty by means of an airlift.

The Prime Minister declared that the signing of a peace treaty was not an act of war. The issue would arise if the Berlin population were deprived of vital supplies; the Western Powers could then refer to their obligation as occupiers to feed the population of Berlin.

Home pointed out that the British had doubts about the probe on the ground but that the plans for garrison airlift, civilian airlift, and diplomatic action seemed sensible to them. He felt that the British should take another look at the problem, a suggestion in which Prime Minister Macmillan concurred.

The President requested Secretary McNamara to obtain more detailed information concerning an airlift and then suggested that the British and Americans should reach conclusions regarding the various effects of a blockage of Berlin before either country discussed the matter with the Germans. The Prime Minister then proposed that at first bilateral discussions be held by the United States and Britain on the actions to be taken if access were blocked. The President agreed to the proposal.

Secretary Rusk commented that additional bilateral planning would be helpful but that it should be rapidly expanded into tripartite planning which in turn should be followed by talks with the Germans.

Home then turned to the political aspects of the Berlin problem and characterized the Western position as being very negative. As in his previous conversation with Secretary Rusk, he expressed the view that the Western presence in Berlin would be on stronger grounds if it were based on a new treaty rather than on the right of conquest. The Foreign Secretary stated that Khrushchev had made one public commitment, namely, to end the occupation status, and he could get off this hook if the Western Powers signed a treaty for a period of ten years or a similar period.

Former Secretary of State Acheson denied that Khrushchev was on a hook and had to be taken off. Khrushchev, Acheson declared, was not a legalist and was pushing only in order to divide the allies. The West had a good position and should uphold it. Acheson felt that the real problem was the reunification of Germany; if the West began talking of signing a treaty, it would undermine the spirit of the Germans.

Secretary Rusk emphasized that the Western Powers were in Berlin not by the grace of Khrushchev but as a result of a war. The United States, Britain, and France were great powers and did not want to be pushed out of Berlin. By changing over to a treaty, they would start going down a slippery slope. When Lord Home again said that the right of conquest was wearing thin, Acheson commented that it was perhaps Western power that was wearing thin.

Secretary Rusk observed that the Western Powers had faced the dilemma all along that they had never made their case with public opinion. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, which had violated most post-war agreements and collected all it was entitled to, was now trying to deprive the Western Powers of their share of the settlement.¹

3. Kennedy-Macmillan Conversation, April 6

The next round of discussions on Berlin between the President, the Prime Minister, and their advisers, on April 6, dealt with the question of Soviet intentions and with the problem of a Western negotiating position on Berlin.

There was, by and large, general agreement that the Soviet Union would not wait much longer and that a Soviet move with respect to Berlin might be expected before the Communist Party Congress in October, especially if Khrushchev should consider this to be necessary to secure his position within the Party. The view was also expressed that East German and Chinese pressure was pushing the Soviet Union in the direction of greater militancy and assumption of greater risks over Berlin than was justified by the interest of the Soviet Union itself. President Kennedy related this discussion to the one of the previous day by stating that if Khrushchev were to be restrained by the threat of a direct confrontation with the West one ought to consider how this threat could be made more formidably and how the issue could be put to Khrushchev as bluntly as possible, in accordance with former Secretary Acheson's suggestions of the previous day. Later on in the discussion, the President enlarged upon this subject by emphasizing that the deterrent effect of the

¹Memorandum by Burdett (BNA) of conversation among the President, Rusk, Macmillan, Home, and others, Apr. 5, 1961, top secret.

Western response kept the Communists from involving the Western Powers in a major struggle over Berlin and that it was therefore necessary to keep the fact of the deterrent in the foreground.

In the matter of the Western negotiating position, the British emphasized the importance of the public presentation of the issue and continued to suggest the possibility of basing the Western rights in Berlin on a treaty to be concluded with the Soviet Union rather than on the occupation status. Lord Home suggested that the Western Powers might propose a continuation of the existing situation in Berlin for a period of perhaps three years during which the East Germans and West Germans might reach some kind of agreement. Macmillan stressed the importance of a prepared Western position in the event that Khrushchev should combine an ultimatum regarding Berlin with a proposal for a conference.

In reply to these British proposals, Ambassador Bruce pointed out that the Soviet Union had such a strong position in Berlin that the Western Powers could not afford to give up what little they had. Bruce also referred to the likely effect that any show of Western weakness with respect to Berlin would have on West Germany and all of Central Europe. He declared that the Western Powers should be prepared to discuss Berlin but not to negotiate on Berlin and that it was best to keep things as they were because there was no feasible alternative.

The President stressed that there was a need for studying what the Western position should be but also for considering Acheson's suggestions as to what to do if it became necessary to act.¹

4. Results of the Kennedy-Macmillan Talks

An American memorandum summarizing the Kennedy-Macmillan talks and intended to institute a review of certain aspects of Berlin contingency planning in accordance with the Kennedy-Macmillan talks was handed to the British Embassy on April 18. According to the memorandum, the two sides had agreed that there would be a review of contingency planning by both sides; that the possibility of a severe Berlin crisis in the current

¹Memorandum by Burdett (BNA) of conversation among the President, Rusk, Macmillan, Home, and others, Apr. 6, 1961, secret.

year had to be realistically expected and that therefore planning for such a crisis should be urgently and thoroughly carried forward; that the loss of Berlin would entail the most serious consequences for the West; that it was important that the matter be brought to an issue with the Soviet Union "at a point which could be defined with some precision and which would obtain public understanding"; specifically, that this point should be "persistent physical interference" with military and civilian traffic to Berlin by the East Germans or the Soviet Union; and that actual preparations for testing Soviet determination should be further advanced.

In the light of these considerations the United States proposed in the memorandum 1) that the currently agreed access procedures intended to define the point beyond which the West would not go in accepting East German controls be reviewed to ensure that they did not confuse the basic issue and would receive maximum public support and understanding; 2) that the contemplated probes of Soviet intentions and the more elaborate military measures within the LIVE OAK planning exercise be reviewed. Finally, the United States declared in the memorandum that it did not regard the state of LIVE OAK planning as adequate and that it believed that General Norstad should be authorized to carry forward this planning, to make the necessary physical preparations contemplated, and to conduct training. The United States, for its part, would move ahead with maximum speed in making certain urgent studies that would provide a basis for decision.¹

But subsequent conversations which Kohler and Hillenbrand had with British Embassy representatives on April 21 and 24 compelled Hillenbrand to note in a memorandum of April 25 that the British had emerged from the recent Macmillan talks in Washington with some "fairly important misconceptions" about American thinking regarding Berlin. Apparently, Acheson's remarks that a Western military response should be made over interference with military or civilian access to Berlin rather than over formal matters such as the stamping of documents had been interpreted by the British to mean that the United States would accept a Soviet-GDR separate peace treaty and would not

¹Letter, Rusk to Caccia, enclosing memorandum for the British Embassy, Apr. 18, 1961, secret.

object to the stamping of documents by GDR officials. To the British this seemed to imply de facto acceptance of the GDR. Hillenbrand commented that this British interpretation of the American position raised fundamental policy questions and he suggested that the British should not be encouraged "to nail down what they believe to be a significant shift in US policy". He therefore proposed that the United States "go slow" with respect to this issue in dealings with the British and that the Secretary, at his next meeting with the British, should explain to them that Acheson was not taking a position which might lead to de facto recognition of the GDR, and that he had merely stipulated the criterion of physical interference with access to Berlin as the point at which the West would have to show its determination, without attempting to put this criterion into concrete terms. In any case, it should be pointed out to the British that the United States could not accept, under cover of contingency planning, an approach involving a fundamental change of policy toward the GDR.¹

B. German-American Talks

1. Rusk-Adenauer Conversation, April 12

Chancellor Adenauer's visit to Washington, April 12-13, 1961, provided the opportunity for further discussions on Berlin with one of the principal allies of the United States.

The problem of Berlin was first taken up in a preliminary discussion between Secretary Rusk, the Chancellor, and Foreign Minister Brentano, on April 12. Although the Secretary confirmed earlier explanations of the American position, which had been given to Adenauer and Brandt (see ante, chapter I, section A), that the United States did not want to stir up the Berlin issue as long as the Russians left it quiet and that the absence of strong language in public exchanges with the Soviet Union served the purpose of restoring channels of communication between the two countries, he assured the Chancellor that the United States took its obligation toward Berlin very seriously and would meet

¹Memorandum by Hillenbrand (GER) of conversation among Kohler (EUR), Hillenbrand (GER), Hood (British Embassy), and Thomson (British Embassy), Apr. 21, 1961, secret; memorandum from Hillenbrand (GER) to Kohler (EUR), Apr. 25, secret.

any test with great firmness. When the Chancellor inquired whether the Western Powers were prepared to take action to make the Soviet Union realize that it must not go too far, the Secretary informed him briefly of the agreement reached in the recent British-American discussions that contingency planning should be reviewed.

Foreign Minister Brentano spoke of the likelihood that the Soviet Union would not attack directly but would conclude a separate treaty with the GDR as a result of which there would be gradual interference with access to Berlin, affecting at first German civilian access rather than allied access. He stated that the Federal Republic would like to participate in discussions on when and how to react to such a situation even though it realized the specific responsibilities of the three Western Powers regarding Berlin.

Secretary Rusk agreed that interference with access must be met by a response that would have to be quadripartite or even broader. He also declared that Berlin contingency planning had to be strengthened, that it should not be treated merely as a planning exercise, and that it ought to be carefully considered at higher levels of government. The Secretary also said that the most difficult situation regarding a separate treaty between the Soviet Union and the GDR would occur if there were no immediate interference with access to Berlin.¹

2. Kennedy-Adenauer Talks, April 13

Berlin contingency planning, together with other related matters, was a major topic in the discussions held on April 13 among the President, Chancellor Adenauer, and their Foreign Ministers.

The President, as he had done in the discussions with the British, emphasized the considerable gap existing between current Berlin contingency planning and the commitments undertaken by the various countries, or between the plans that had been drawn up and what the individual nations were willing to do in case of need.

¹Memorandum by Cash (GER) of conversation among Rusk, Adenauer, Brentano, and others, Apr. 12, 1961, secret.

He, the President, wished to have an absolutely clear understanding on the part of the United States, Britain, France, and West Germany as to what each country would do in a concerted action and how each country would respond to the pressures that might arise. The United States, for instance, the President said, wanted to strengthen the military probes to be undertaken in the event of a formal blockade of Berlin by the Soviet Union or the GDR. The President mentioned to the Germans that he had discussed the whole problem recently with the British but that no final conclusions had been reached. Moreover, he had no idea what General de Gaulle was prepared to do. The President therefore wished to have the Chancellor's ideas on the best way to strengthen the allied position in Berlin and to demonstrate firmness, and also regarding West Germany's role in an emergency with particular reference to the commitment of German troops.

In his reply, the Chancellor referred to his discussions in February 1959 with the late Secretary Dulles (see Part I, chapters II and IV), who had indicated to him that the United States would use military force if its troops were cut off from access to Berlin. Adenauer stressed, however, that there had been no talk of "German forces being used beyond the Iron Curtain", since Dulles had regarded the situation in terms of the four-power agreements on Berlin. The Chancellor remarked in this connection that the problems of international law involved in the Berlin situation were very complicated and should be studied very carefully. In any case, he wished to assure the President that the Federal Republic was prepared to do everything necessary for the joint cause.

Foreign Minister Brentano brought up the possibility of a separate peace treaty giving the GDR control over access to Berlin as a result of which there might at first be interference only with German civilian traffic to Berlin. Brentano suggested that, in order to carry out the various commitments, it was necessary for the three Western Powers to work out jointly with the Federal Republic a program for action to be taken in a number of specifically designated contingencies. At the next stage, Brentano felt, the matter should be discussed with NATO since the NATO guarantee was likewise involved. He therefore proposed a discussion of contingency planning on a high level in order to clarify and confirm the commitments undertaken by the various parties concerned.

In the course of this meeting, the Chancellor and other members of the German group discussed the various aspects of the Berlin situation from the point of view of international law. This involved the quadripartite war-time agreements, the constitution of the Federal Republic, the occupation statute of 1949, the rights of the inhabitants of Berlin, and the de facto relationship that had developed between West Berlin and the Federal Republic. The consensus was that the legal situation concerning Berlin was "a most confused one."

With respect to actual interference with allied access to Berlin, Chancellor Adenauer made the statement that, if American soldiers trying to exercise their right of access to Berlin were attacked, the Federal Republic under its NATO commitment would have to bring its troops into play.

Secretary Rusk confirmed that the three Western Powers were principally and most critically involved in Berlin, but he also stressed the NATO guarantee and the fact that the Federal Republic, as representative of the German state and people, had claims to Berlin. The Secretary said that the United States understood these gradations of rights, duties, and responsibilities. The fact was, however, that as the need for action arose a practical situation would obliterate these gradations of rights and responsibilities. For this reason, the Secretary, too, felt that a very careful scrutiny of the problem was required in order to determine the role of everybody and the way in which each party would meet its responsibilities.¹

3. Rusk-Grewe Conversation, April 15: Clarification of the West German Position

On April 15 Ambassador Grewe called on Secretary Rusk to inform him that the Chancellor, Foreign Minister Brentano, and he, after reviewing the talks in Washington, had come to the conclusion that the Federal Republic's position on Berlin contingency planning had perhaps not been made quite clear and therefore required some additional explanation.

After giving his view of West Germany's role in contingency planning so far, Grewe emphasized that the Federal Republic had been largely excluded from contingency planning as a result of

¹Memorandum by Lejins (LS) of conversation among the President, Rusk, Adenauer, Brentano, and others, Apr. 13, 1961, secret.

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French and British opposition based on the argument of exclusive tripartite legal competency for Berlin. As a result of this, the Germans had only been given information after planning had been completed and they were reluctant to press too much for a larger role because of the basic tripartite responsibility for Berlin. Grewe emphasized that these considerations were behind the Chancellor's statement in the recent talks that German forces could not be expected to participate in initial actions. He believed it sufficient to state that, if the three allies were involved in hostilities, the Germans would be involved also, along with the rest of the alliance. Grewe declared that in his view this was the best formula and that he did not want any misunderstanding to arise over its implications.

In replying to Grew's statements, Secretary Rusk first emphasized that there was no doubt whatever concerning the primary responsibility of the three allies as occupying powers for Berlin. The United States therefore would not expect the Federal Republic to participate in the initial steps to be taken. In fact, the Secretary stated, the United States would be deeply concerned by any steps that the Federal Republic might take in advance of the three powers.

Secretary Rusk also stressed that the situation was somewhat affected by the de facto changes with respect to the status of the armed forces in Western Europe. American, Canadian and German divisions were in a state of readiness while the British and French forces were not. But if any serious fighting broke out, all would be involved. In this connection the Secretary again pointed to the need for tripartite and quadripartite consultations regarding the contingencies that might arise with respect to Berlin, on which there was no full tripartite or quadripartite agreement at the moment. The Secretary declared that the Federal Republic ought to be considerably more involved in this consultative process than it was at the present. Secretary Rusk also reiterated the American position expressed in earlier discussions that the present gap between Western plans and policies in the field of contingency planning must be closed and that there must be a review of these matters on the highest governmental level.

The Secretary stated in concluding his reply that he had now a better understanding of the Chancellor's position regarding the participation of West German armed forces. The United States understood, the Secretary said, that the Federal Republic did

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not want to see any diminution in the basic four Power responsibility for Berlin or to get involved in decisions taken without German participation. Secretary Rusk explained also that tripartite discussions would be held first, not in order to achieve fixed positions before the Federal Republic was brought in, but because of the basic legal responsibility of the three Powers. The four governments, he suggested, should straighten out the matter. Other countries would perhaps have to be brought also into the picture because NATO as an organization could, after all, be involved by tripartite action.

Ambassador Grewe brought up another aspect of the problem of a participation of German forces in any probe regarding Berlin. He pointed out that such a participation would represent a change in the situation since the East German population would take it as a signal for a general uprising which would presumably result in extending the conflict. Secretary Rusk commented that this German view was correct in as much as it related to initial action aimed at re-opening access. But if the other side took military counteraction this point would be passed.

When Grew brought up again the Federal Republic's concern over Communist "salami tactics" in Berlin such as interference with German civilian access to Berlin only, the Secretary observed that it would be difficult to draw a line between the communications with the outside of the few thousand Western troops in Berlin and those of the civilian population. The Secretary referred particularly to the effect of disorders in the city on the Allied troops and suggested that this question also be studied.¹

C. Discussions of Germany and Berlin at
Meetings at Oslo, May 7-10

1. Tripartite Talks, May 7

The Oslo Meeting of the NATO Foreign Ministers, May 8-10, provided another opportunity for discussion of the Berlin problem with the allies. This discussion was on a tripartite, a quadripartite, and a NATO-wide basis.

¹Memorandum by Hillenbrand (GER) of conversation between Rusk and Grewe, Apr. 15, 1961, secret.

The tripartite discussions, held on May 7, were in preparation for a meeting of the three Western Foreign Ministers with Brentano scheduled for the evening of May 8. With respect to the Berlin problem the tripartite talks dealt primarily with two questions, namely, a) whether the Western Powers should take the initiative regarding negotiations with the Soviet Union on Berlin, and b) whether they should attempt to correct Khrushchev's misapprehensions concerning Western firmness in the matter of Berlin.

The course of the talks indicated a general agreement that a Western initiative in launching discussions on Germany and Berlin was not desirable at the moment. The United States and Britain, moreover, displayed little interest when French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville raised the question whether the three Western Foreign Ministers ought not to take advantage of Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko's presence at the conference on Laos, scheduled to open at Geneva May 16, by raising with him the question of Berlin.

Much of the discussion was devoted to speculation about Soviet intentions with regard to Berlin and Germany. Couve de Murville predicted that the Soviet Union, at some point, presumably after the West German elections in September, would propose a conference for the purpose of signing peace treaties with West Germany and East Germany in the expectation that the Western Powers would refuse to attend. Thereafter, the French Foreign Minister believed, Khrushchev would call a conference and proceed with the signing of a peace treaty with East Germany, a step that would be followed by the transfer of Soviet responsibilities for access to the GDR. Couve de Murville also stressed repeatedly the seriousness with which the Soviet Union approached the Berlin problem as one affecting its vital interests.

The French Foreign Minister's prediction as to what the Soviet Union was likely to do was essentially based on the information which the three Western Powers had received from the Germans regarding statements made by Khrushchev in a conversation with Western German Ambassador Kroll on April 24. According to an account of this conversation given to the Four Power Working Group in Washington by Ambassador Grewe on May 2, Khrushchev had declared that the problems of Berlin and of a separate peace treaty would be solved in the course of 1961 and that he would wait until after the West German elections in September and possibly until after the Soviet Party Congress in October but no longer. The Soviet Premier had then outlined a course of action along the

predictions made by the French Foreign Minister, to which reference has been made in the foregoing.¹

A discussion by the three Western Foreign Ministers of possible Western counterproposals to the expected Soviet offer of a free city of West Berlin was inconclusive. However, there was a consensus that the West should at least start with some kind of an all-Berlin proposal. Secretary Rusk also emphasized that the West should respond not by simply making concessions to the Soviet Union but by putting forward demands of its own. The Secretary suggested in this connection that the West might, for example, demand a corridor to Berlin. The expected Soviet refusal of such a demand would be no more relevant than Western refusal of Soviet demands.²

2. Quadripartite Talks, May 8

The subjects of Germany and Berlin were taken up in somewhat greater detail at a quadripartite Foreign Ministers meeting on May 8 following the preparatory meeting of the three Western Foreign Ministers on May 7.

In general, the four Foreign Ministers were in agreement that there was at this time no basis for a Western initiative in favor of negotiations with the Soviet Union on Berlin. West German Foreign Minister Brentano stressed that any change in the status of Berlin was likely to be a deterioration. He also pointed out that, while a peace treaty between the Soviet Union and the GDR would have no legal effect, it might help the GDR to achieve greater recognition among the non-committed nations. When British Foreign Secretary Home asked whether West Germany was prepared, as the price of preventing a separate treaty, to accept an interim arrangement on Berlin for 18-24 months during which East Germans and West Germans would try to settle the problem, Brentano expressed opposition to any suggestion of all-German talks. The West German Foreign Minister declared that, apart from the problem of sitting down with representatives of a regime that lacked a meaningful mandate, such talks could produce

¹Memorandum by Fritts (GER) of Meeting of Four Power Working Group on Germany and Berlin, May 2, 1961, secret. Cf. Hans Kroll, Botschafter in Belgrad, Tokio und Moskau, 1953-1962 (Munich, 1969), p. 316-321.

²Memorandum by Hillenbrand (GER) of conversation among Rusk, Home, Couve de Murville, and others, May 7, 1961, secret; from Oslo, tel. SECTO 13, May 8, secret.

results only if the Federal Republic were prepared to make concessions that would jeopardize the freedom of West Germany and threaten the Western Alliance.

The British Foreign Secretary declared that the implications of this discussion led to the conclusion that, even if the Soviet Union offered to negotiate and put forward a seemingly attractive proposal, the West would have no negotiating position. All the Western Powers could then do, Home said, was to tell the Soviet Union to go ahead with the signing of a separate treaty, and then face the consequences. Brentano thereupon explained that he was opposed to a Western initiative on negotiations but that he would not reject negotiations a priori if the initiative were taken by the Soviet Union.

Couve de Murville dealt with fears frequently expressed by the West Germans that Communist interference with access to Berlin would first affect German civilian traffic rather than allied access. He felt that such a situation was not likely to develop because the threat resulting from a separate treaty would be directed against allied military traffic considering that German civilian traffic was already under East German control. In this connection, Couve de Murville re-emphasized his statement made in the tripartite Foreign Ministers meeting that the Soviet Union was completely serious with regard to Berlin as of vital interest to it. Therefore the Soviet Union could be expected to turn over control over access to the GDR by concluding a separate treaty with the latter.

On the subject of negotiations, the French Foreign Minister declared that he saw no reason why the Western Powers could not negotiate with the Soviet Union as they had done at Geneva in 1959. But he also stressed that the essential basis for the preservation of the freedom of West Berlin was the continued Western military presence in the city although not necessarily at the current level of forces.

The four Foreign Ministers agreed that a possible misconception on the part of Khrushchev regarding allied firmness over the issue of Berlin could be highly dangerous and that means to correct it ought to be seriously considered. The Foreign Ministers believed that removal of such misapprehensions was particularly important in the light of a remark made by Khrushchev in his conversation with the West German Ambassador (which Brentano reported to the other Foreign Ministers) to the effect that the West would do nothing for the two million Berliners.

In reply to a question by Secretary Rusk, Brentano denied that the determination of the West Berliners had weakened as a result of increased prosperity. He also declared emphatically that the loss of Berlin would have a disastrous effect on the Federal Republic and the whole Western alliance.

On several occasions during this conversation Brentano urged full German participation in contingency planning. Such participation, he felt, would not diminish basic tripartite responsibility for Berlin. Secretary Rusk remarked, in this connection, that it would be helpful if the Federal Republic gave a full exposition as to how it conceived its responsibility for Berlin, including the legal aspects. Referring to discussions of Berlin contingency planning in the NATO discussions of the same day, the Secretary suggested that the Western Powers should move ahead with their work on contingency planning and submit a report on it to NATO.¹

3. Meetings of NATO Foreign Ministers, May 8-9

Discussion. Berlin and Germany played only a minor part in the discussions of the NATO Foreign Ministers in Oslo. These issues were overshadowed by the problems of Laos, Africa, and disarmament, as well as by questions relating to the structure of the alliance and its long-range planning in the political, military, and economic fields. However, in the context of a review of the international situation on May 8 and 9, there was an exchange of views on Germany and Berlin among the members of the alliance.

Secretary Rusk, in reviewing the international situation, held it likely that the Soviet Union would increase tension over Berlin during the summer, presumably by threatening to make a separate peace treaty with the GDR. Negotiations might be desirable, depending on how the issue was raised, the Secretary said, and the West should review promptly the position to be taken. The Secretary emphasized that the West must make it clear that it would consider conclusion of a separate treaty a violation of the legal situation. If the Soviet Union nevertheless, proceeded, Secretary Rusk stated, the West would have to

¹Memorandum by Hillenbrand (GER) of conversation among Rusk, Home, Couve de Mirville, Brentano, and others, May 8, 1961, secret; from Oslo, tel. SECTO 27, May 9, secret.

convince the Soviet Union that it was prepared to resist any encroachment on its rights in Berlin. Finally, the Secretary stated that a report on current Berlin contingency planning would be made to the North Atlantic Council in the near future.

In the discussion the Foreign Ministers of Britain, France, and West Germany expressed views along the lines of their statements in the tripartite or quadripartite meetings. But West Germany's Foreign Minister also took the opportunity to emphasize the Federal Republic's obligation toward Berlin as well as the obligation undertaken by all members of the alliance in the communiqué of December 1958. Apart from making this point, Brentano stressed that there was no evidence of any change in Soviet intentions or tactics aimed at weakening the Western will to resist. He declared that, if the Soviet Union came to believe that the free world would not risk armed conflict over Berlin, it would take over the city.

In the further course of the discussion, those among the NATO Foreign Ministers who spoke on the subject of Berlin generally limited themselves to underlining points made by the four major Western Powers.

Belgian Foreign Minister Spaak, emphasizing that the issue of Berlin would certainly be raised again, urged that the West not wait until the height of the crisis before preparing its counterproposals, its defense, and its counter propaganda (polemique). Spaak also suggested that the adequacy of the Western position at the Geneva Conference of 1959 should be carefully examined, and he called upon the four Western Powers principally concerned with Berlin to suggest to their NATO partners the policy that was to be followed.

Dutch Foreign Minister Luns declared that he shared West Germany's misgivings regarding Soviet intentions with respect to Berlin, urged early consultation in this matter, and suggested in particular that studies of economic countermeasures against harassment in Berlin should continue. Greek Foreign Minister Averoff-Tosizza wondered whether the West was prepared to oppose Soviet military action against West Berlin and expressed the belief that the possibility of such Soviet action depended on Western readiness to fight a war over Berlin. Canadian Minister of External Affairs Green, on the other hand, emphasized that, in view of a possible Soviet threat with regard to Berlin, the West should begin the study of new proposals on Germany while at the same time consulting within the NATO Council regarding

contingency planning. This latter point was also taken up in the resumé of the discussion by NATO Secretary General Stikker, who requested the four governments concerned with contingency planning to give the North Atlantic Council some indication of what was being done in that field. Stikker also inquired about the planning for economic countermeasures and for negotiations.

Replying to the suggestions put forward in the discussion, Secretary Rusk expressed the hope that a report on current contingency planning could be presented to the North Atlantic Council before long.¹

The communiqué adopted on May 10 reflected some of the discussion of the NATO Foreign Ministers on Berlin and Germany. The Ministers noted with regret the lack of progress in the reunification of Germany and reaffirmed their conviction that a peaceful and just solution of the German problem could be found only on the basis of self-determination. With regard to Berlin, they reiterated the determination of the members of NATO, as expressed in the declaration of December 16, 1958, to maintain the freedom of West Berlin and its inhabitants. With respect to the threat of a separate peace, the NATO Foreign Ministers likewise reaffirmed the statements contained in the declaration of December 1958 that Soviet denunciation of inter-allied agreements on Berlin could in no way deprive the other parties of their rights or relieve the Soviet Union of its obligations.²

D. French-American Talks

1. Kennedy-De Gaulle Conversation, May 31

The French-American talks held in Paris, May 31-June 2, took place in an atmosphere quite different from that of earlier conversations which President Kennedy had held with the major

¹From Oslo, tels. SECTO 15, May 8, 1961; SECTO 19, May 8; SECTO 29, May 10; SECTO 30, May 10; all secret; North Atlantic Council, Ministerial Meetings, May 8, May 9, Verbatim Record, C-VR (61) 16, May 8, C-VR (61) 18, May 9; both NATO secret.

²Department of State press release 307, May 10, 1961.

allied leaders. When the President went to Paris to meet with General de Gaulle on May 31, he was on his way to the meeting with Khrushchev scheduled to take place in Vienna, June 3-4. This forthcoming meeting of the leaders of the two most powerful nations of the world (which will be taken up in the next section of this study) dominated entirely the international scene and naturally lent a special character to the Kennedy-de Gaulle meeting held, as it were, on the eve of that fateful East-West confrontation.

The French-American talks covered, of course, a large range of subjects of common interest to the two countries and, owing to General de Gaulle's views on the subject, centered on France's role in the Western Alliance. But, in view of the special responsibilities of the two countries toward Berlin and the particular moment at which the meeting between the two Presidents occurred, it is not surprising that the Berlin problem played a significant part in their discussions.

The issue of Berlin was taken up primarily in the course of the first talks between President Kennedy and General de Gaulle, on May 31.

President Kennedy reported to de Gaulle that the Soviet Premier, in a recent conversation with Ambassador Thompson, had indicated his intention to carry out his "commitments" regarding Berlin. The President declared that any retreat over Berlin would seriously weaken the Western alliance and then pointed out that there were two possible courses of action for the Western Powers. They could say to the Soviet Union that neither the status of Berlin nor Western access rights were subject to negotiation; or they could state that, while Western access rights were not negotiable, there could be talks about the future status of Berlin.

President de Gaulle felt that Khrushchev's failure to act in spite of his assertion that his prestige was involved in the Berlin issue indicated that the Soviet leader did not want war. In any case, there was no reason for the West to withdraw from Berlin. De Gaulle recalled his own conversation with Khrushchev (apparently in April 1960; see ante, Part III) in the course of which he had told the Soviet leader that if he wanted a detente he should proceed with disarmament talks which, in the long run, might lead to a solution of the problems of Germany and Berlin. But, de Gaulle said, he had also tried to impress upon Khrushchev

that, if Khrushchev insisted on raising the Berlin issue in a cold war context, it would indicate that he did not want a peaceful solution.

When President Kennedy pointed out that the problem was to convince the Soviet Union that the Western position was firm, General de Gaulle expressed full agreement. The French President furthermore emphasized that permitting interference with access to Berlin, acceptance of a change in the status of Berlin, or withdrawal of Western troops from that city were all alternatives that would represent defeat and would lead to the loss of Germany as well as to a serious weakening of the Western position in France, Italy, and other countries. De Gaulle stressed that the Western Powers must reject Soviet demands for a change in the status of Berlin regardless of whether the Soviet Union itself or the GDR would benefit from such a change. The West, de Gaulle declared, must make clear its willingness to go to war, although he did not believe that the Soviet Union wanted war.

President Kennedy raised the question of what the Western reaction should be if the Soviet Union, following the conclusion of a separate treaty, should transfer its rights of inspection to the GDR which would then begin stamping allied documents. Should the Western Powers act at once or should they wait until the GDR imposed restrictions on access?

General de Gaulle stated in reply that the Soviet Union could sign anything it wanted with the GDR. The Western Powers should make it clear, however, that they would not accept any consequences of that sort resulting from a Soviet-East German agreement and that responsibility for Berlin could be changed only by the four occupying powers. De Gaulle warned that failure to act at once in such an event would lead to nibbling at the Western position until it was lost without ever having appeared as being lost.

President Kennedy pointed out that the mere signing of a peace treaty with the GDR by the Soviet Union was not a reason per se for military action by the Western Powers. Likewise, it was difficult, the President said, to find a way to respond to nibbling actions.

General de Gaulle declared that the criterion was the use of force either by the Soviet Union or by the GDR in cutting Berlin's communications.

President Kennedy asked General de Gaulle whether he was satisfied with existing allied plans providing for probes by Western forces of company strength and, in the event of failure, of brigade strength. De Gaulle replied that there was no possibility of a Western victory in Berlin, and therefore the West had to make it clear that fighting around Berlin meant general war.

President Kennedy declared at this point in the conversations that the general positions of the two sides were in basic agreement--and that they were also agreed on immediate consultation among the three Western Powers in case of a separate treaty between the Soviet Union and the GDR and on a review of Berlin contingency plans in coordination with the British. In this connection the President stated that Western military plans were not adequate to the situation.

President de Gaulle remarked that Prime Minister MacMillan's position on the subject was somewhat hesitant. He again emphasized in this context the need for Western firmness and for making Khrushchev understand that the Western Powers were prepared to wage nuclear war if necessary.

President Kennedy agreed that the British position was hesitant and that the Western Powers must make clear their position by taking action. The President declared that the United States was strengthening its capabilities and that additional planning in common might be useful. De Gaulle apparently thought that the President had in mind a strengthening of the garrisons in West Berlin and declared this to be useful. President Kennedy thereupon pointed out that supplying the Berlin garrison presented no problem but that supplying the civilian population was a problem of some magnitude.

In discussing the possibility of a Soviet blockade against Berlin, General de Gaulle also drew attention to the fact that the Soviet Union needed commercial relations with the West and that the GDR was greatly dependent on trade with West Germany. Thus, there was the possibility of effective Western economic retaliation, and consequently the Western position in Berlin, de Gaulle said, was not as weak as some people thought.¹

¹From Paris, tel. 5266, May 31, 1961, and tel. 5278, June 1, both secret; U.S. Del. Memoranda US/MC/1, and US/MC/2 of conversations held between President Kennedy and President de Gaulle, May 31, both secret.

2. Talks Between American and French Officials, June 1

In the course of President Kennedy's visit to Paris, certain aspects of the Berlin problem were also discussed between French and American officials on June 1.

Assistant Secretary of State Kohler, after briefly summarizing the talks held in April between the President and Prime Minister Macmillan, referred to the two conclusions reached after a review of contingency planning by the new American administration. First, that there was a gap between planning and basic governmental decisions that had to be taken. Secondly, that the probes envisaged were insufficient and should be increased in scope and nature.

French Foreign Minister Couve de Murville agreed that further discussions on contingency planning should be held among the three Western allies.

There was a brief discussion of a possible role for the United Nations in a crisis over Berlin. Couve de Murville expressed the view that the United Nations should be brought in only after the Western Powers had taken action themselves. Ambassador Bohlen pointed out, however, that for reasons of international law and public opinion it might not be possible to exclude UN action regarding Berlin.

There was some argument concerning the action to be taken in case of a blockage of land access. Couve de Murville expressed doubts that action on the ground should be the response to a threat to access to Berlin and instead advocated that the showdown should be made in the air, after the Soviet Union had withdrawn from the Berlin Air Safety Center and the East Germans had begun to interfere with civilian air traffic to Berlin. Ambassador Bohlen and Assistant Secretary Kohler made it clear that the United States had different views on that subject. They emphasized that an airlift could not supply Berlin if civilian communications on the ground were cut. The principal American argument was, however, that the Soviet Union would regard resort to an airlift as an evasive action on the part of the Western Powers and that it was of the utmost importance to maintain the principle of unrestricted Western access to Berlin by road, rail, and in the air. The United States finally proposed that, following the Vienna meeting, new instructions be sent to the tripartite group on contingency planning. This suggestion was approved by both sides.

The French Foreign Minister also raised the problem of German participation in contingency planning and referred to German pressure toward that end. Kohler declared that the United States favored German participation in order to spur the Germans to greater activity and to strengthen German support for Western policies. But he stressed at the same time that it was necessary to avoid German participation in early probes and to keep tripartite and quadripartite planning separate. Couve de Murville agreed that the Germans should be kept fully informed about contingency planning and also accepted the American formulation that they should "participate as necessary."¹

3. Kennedy-De Gaulle Discussion, June 2: Agreements Reached

The problem of Berlin was briefly discussed in a meeting between President Kennedy and General de Gaulle held on June 2.

First, in the context of a discussion on the problem of tripartite consultations within the Western Alliance, President Kennedy noted that existing contingency plans did not envisage the use of nuclear weapons if Berlin were blockaded but that the United States would respond with nuclear weapons if Berlin were seized by force as this would constitute an attack on American forces in Europe.

In the course of this meeting, General de Gaulle reviewed the positions of France and the United States regarding Berlin and declared that there was full agreement between the two countries. It depended on Khrushchev, de Gaulle said, whether there would be a crisis over Berlin. Therefore, President Kennedy should tell the Soviet leader at Vienna that the United States and France were fully agreed that there should be no modification of the Berlin statute by force. Finally, de Gaulle stated that the two Presidents had agreed that tripartite military experts should consult closely on Berlin contingency planning.²

¹U.S. Del. memorandum US/MC/5, dated June 2, 1961, of conversation among American and French officials, June 1, secret.

²U.S. Del. Memorandum US/MC/7, June 5, 1961, of conversation among President Kennedy, de Gaulle, and others, June 2, 1961, secret; from Paris, tel. SECTO 9, June 2, eyes only Acting Secretary, secret.

The accord reached by the two Presidents with respect to Berlin also found expression in the published communiqué of June 2, which stated that they had "confirmed the identity of their views on their commitments and responsibilities toward Berlin."¹

From Paris, tel. SECTO 7, June 2, 1961, unclassified.

Chapter III

MEETING BETWEEN PRESIDENT KENNEDY AND PREMIER KHRUSHCHEV
AT VIENNA, JUNE 3-4, 1961A. Background of the Meeting

It has been mentioned earlier in this study that President Kennedy, in a letter of February 22, had expressed hope for an early exchange of views with Khrushchev in a personal meeting. Ambassador Thompson discussed the possibility of such a meeting with Khrushchev when he handed him the President's letter on March 9. However, subsequent developments, particularly the sharp exchanges between the President and Khrushchev in April 1961 in connection with the unsuccessful attempt by Cuban exiles to overthrow the Castro regime, prompted the United States to abandon active consideration of the idea of such a meeting. Subsequently, the Soviet Union revived the idea in a meeting between Ambassador Thompson and Soviet Foreign Minister Gromyko on May 4.¹

On May 12 Khrushchev addressed a letter to the President welcoming the spirit of cooperation expressed in the President's letter which he had received on March 9 but expressing also regret that the international atmosphere had become heated as a result of the Cuban events. After stating that he favored bilateral exchanges between the two countries of the kind President Franklin Roosevelt had engaged in with the Soviet Union, Khrushchev declared that he accepted the suggestion of a meeting with the President in Vienna, June 3-4.

With respect to current international problems, Khrushchev declared that one which urgently required a solution was the "problem of a peaceful settlement including the question of Western Berlin." The Soviet Premier remarked that he had put forward the Soviet position in conversations with Ambassador

¹To Paris, tel. TOPOL 1642, May 22, 1961, secret. For published texts of the exchanges between President Kennedy and Premier Khrushchev regarding Cuba, Apr. 18-22, 1961, see Department of State Bulletin, May 8, 1961, pp. 662-667.

Thompson "in complete frankness" and that he hoped the President would approach this position with understanding. The Soviet Union, Khrushchev asserted, did not demand any unilateral advantages for itself; but it proposed a peaceful settlement proceeding from the actually existing situation and directed toward "liquidation of a dangerous source of tension in the heart of Europe." Finally, Khrushchev declared that the Soviet Union wanted a line drawn under World War II. In his view the signature of a peace treaty would be a significant landmark in the improvement of relations between the two countries.¹

On May 19 it was officially announced, in a White House news release, that the President and Khrushchev would meet in Vienna June 3-4. The announcement emphasized that it was understood by both sides that "the meeting is not for the purpose of negotiating or reaching agreement on the major international problems that involve the interests of many countries". But the meeting would offer the opportunity for the first personal contact between the two leaders and for a general exchange of views on the major issues affecting the relationships between the two countries. This point was expressed more fully and openly in an instruction the Department sent to the United States mission with NATO on May 22 which stated that the Vienna meeting would provide an opportunity "to remove misconceptions, if they exist;" if there should be any illusion on the Soviet side "that US not ready to live up to its commitments, this would be good chance to disabuse them of this idea." This instruction also explained that an important factor in the American decision to agree to the meeting was that the alternative would have been to rebuff this Soviet overture. In addition, the United States recognized that, due to the nature of the Soviet system, its representatives tended to speak more frankly at the highest level.²

¹Letter, Khrushchev to Kennedy, May 12, 1961, sent to Geneva in tel. TOSEC 121, May 16, eyes only/secret.

²White House press release, May 19, 1961; to Paris, tel. POLTO 1642, May 22, secret.

B. The Conversations at Vienna

1. Principal Discussion on Germany and Berlin, June 4

As the first day of the two-day meeting between the President and Khrushchev was mainly devoted to a discussion of the general state of Soviet-American relations and to the specific issues of Laos, Cuba, and Communist China, the questions of Germany and Berlin were not taken up until June 4. Yet the President undoubtedly had in mind the Soviet threat to Berlin when he tried to impress upon Khrushchev in the course of this general discussion the danger of any miscalculations by their two countries, which were in possession of the modern weapons of destruction. Khrushchev questioned the term "miscalculation", asserted that the United States might consider the Soviet Union's defense of its vital interests as a "miscalculation", and declared that the latter would not be intimidated in its defense of those vital interests.¹

The principal discussion of the problems of Berlin and Germany was held in the morning of June 4. It opened with Khrushchev's statement that he wanted the United States to understand the Soviet position on Germany. After referring to the losses of the Soviet Union in World War II and to the emergence of a new "German militarism", Khrushchev declared that a line had to be drawn under World War II and a peace treaty signed. He said that he would prefer to proceed in agreement with the President, but if the United States failed to understand Soviet wishes the USSR would proceed alone and sign a treaty with the GDR and the Federal Republic, provided the latter so desired. Otherwise, a peace treaty would be signed with the GDR alone as a result of which the state of war would cease and all commitments stemming from the German surrender would become invalid. This would apply to institutions, occupation rights, and access to Berlin, including the air corridors. Khrushchev, furthermore, declared that a free city of West Berlin would be established and described the latter in the familiar terms of earlier Soviet proposals.

¹Memorandum by Akalovsky (D/P) of conversation among the President, Rusk, Khrushchev, Gromyko, and others, June 3, 1961, secret; see also Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York, 1965), pp. 584-586.

President Kennedy declared that this discussion involved not only the legal situation but also particular facts which greatly affected the security of the United States. The American position in Berlin, the President emphasized, was not based on anyone's sufferance but on contractual rights acquired through a war in which the United States had fought. The President pointed out that an area was involved where all his predecessors since 1945 had been committed by treaties and other contractual obligations and had reaffirmed their faithfulness to these obligations. If the United States accepted being expelled from this area and losing its rights, no one would place any trust in American commitments and pledges. This question involved not only Berlin but all of Western Europe, which was vital to American security, and he found it difficult to understand, the President said, why the Soviet Union should suggest that the United States abandon an area where it had vital interests. The President stated that the United States could not accept an ultimatum which would result in its becoming isolated by losing its ties with Western Europe. He had not become President to preside over the isolation of his country.

Rejecting Khrushchev's charge that the United States wanted to improve its position in Berlin, the President pointed out that the United States was not pushing anywhere and was only interested in maintaining its position in Berlin and its right to access to that city. The President said that he realized that the situation was not a satisfactory one and that it had been described as "abnormal" in the conversation between President Eisenhower and Premier Khrushchev at Camp David in September 1959. But this was not the right time, President Kennedy emphasized, to change the situation in Berlin and the balance of power in general. If this balance were changed, the situation in Europe as a whole would change and the United States would suffer a most serious loss. The President pointed out that the Soviet Union would not accept a loss of this kind and that the United States would not accept it either. Thus, the President declared, it was not the question of a peace treaty but of our access to Berlin and our rights there.

Khrushchev replied by stating that the United States was unwilling to normalize the situation in the most dangerous spot in the world. The USSR, however, wanted to perform an operation on this sore spot--"to eliminate this thorn, this ulcer" without prejudicing the interests of anyone. After

reasserting that the peace treaty would only confirm existing boundaries and thus eliminate ideas of revising them, Khrushchev asserted that no force would prevent the USSR from signing a peace treaty. After it was signed the sovereignty of the GDR would be observed, and any violation of it would be regarded by the Soviet Union as open aggression with all the consequences that would ensue from this. When the President inquired at this point whether a peace treaty would block Western access to Berlin, Khrushchev affirmed that it would.

The President thereupon declared that the decision to sign a peace treaty was a serious one and that the Soviet Union should consider it in the light of its national interests. Emphasizing again the effects on the credibility of American commitments if the United States accepted its expulsion from West Berlin and the basic change in the balance of power resulting from it, the President declared that this was a most serious challenge with unforeseeably serious consequences. He had come to Vienna, he said, in the hope that the relations between their two countries could be improved but not to find out that a peace treaty would be signed and that the United States would be denied its rights of access to Berlin. The President expressed the hope that Khrushchev would consider both his own and the President's responsibilities toward their respective countries. The issue involved not only West Berlin but Western Europe and the United States as well.

Khrushchev's reaction was merely to restate his earlier arguments with hardly any change. He stated explicitly this time that a peace treaty with continued Western rights of occupation could not be visualized. When the President interjected that American rights were based on four-power agreements, Khrushchev admitted that this was so, asserting, however, that those rights would expire with the termination of the state of war. The President emphatically rejected Khrushchev's assertion that all of Berlin was on the territory of the GDR and also denied that the Soviet Union had the right to transfer Western rights in Berlin to the GDR. Khrushchev, for his part, maintained that the President's point had no juridical foundation as the war had ended 16 years earlier; moreover, President Roosevelt had indicated that troops could be withdrawn after two or two and a half years.

Following some discussion of the fact that West Berlin lacked any military significance, Khrushchev brought up the possibility of an interim agreement that would not involve the prestige of the two countries. He suggested that the four powers should give the "two German Governments" six months to solve the question of German reunification and that they should disavow their responsibilities if no agreement was reached at the end of this period. Then anyone would be free to sign a peace treaty. Khrushchev regretted American failure to understand the Soviet position but expressed the hope that there would be no war for ideological reasons. Yet he insisted that the Soviet Union could no longer delay the signing of a treaty and that this would probably take place by the end of the year.

President Kennedy declared that the United States did not wish to precipitate a crisis over Berlin but that the United States commitment in Berlin was profound and had a long history. The President made it clear that signing of a peace treaty was not a belligerent act but that a peace treaty denying the contractual rights of the United States would be. If the United States accepted Khrushchev's proposals regarding Berlin, the world would not regard the United States as a serious country. But it was very important that the United States should be considered as a serious country. Again the President emphasized that he had not come into office to accept arrangements inimical to the interests of the United States.

At the end of the conversation, Khrushchev came back to the question of an interim agreement, expressing himself in favor of it, though admitting that the Germans would be unable to arrive at such an agreement regardless of the specified length of the interim period. But in Khrushchev's view such an agreement would give the formal appearance that responsibility for the problem had been turned over to the Germans themselves; and if the United States did not want to accept such an arrangement the Soviet Union would have to sign a peace treaty unilaterally. Finally, Khrushchev said that the Soviet Union had prepared a memorandum on the Berlin question so that the United States could study it and perhaps return to the question later.¹

¹Memorandum by Akalovsky (D/P) of conversation among the President, Rusk, Khrushchev, Gromyko, and others, June 4, 1961, secret.

2. Final Kennedy-Khrushchev Exchange on Berlin, June 4

In a last brief meeting with Khrushchev alone in the afternoon of June 4, the President once more pointed out to him Berlin's importance to the United States and expressed the hope that the Soviet Union would not present him with a situation deeply involving America's national interest. The President conceded that the Soviet Union had to make its own decisions regarding Berlin, but he urged that these decisions be considered carefully and that Soviet-American relations be developed in a way that would avoid a direct confrontation between the two countries.

Khrushchev stated in reply that he appreciated the President's frankness but also said that if the borders of the GDR on land, sea, or in the air were violated, as a result of insistence by the United States on its rights in Berlin following the signing of a separate peace treaty, they would be defended. The Soviet Premier warned that, if the United States envisaged any action that would bring about unhappy consequences, "force would be met by force," and that both countries would have to prepare themselves for that situation. Khrushchev made also clear, in answer to a question by the President, that under an interim agreement Western forces would remain in Berlin for six months but would then have to be withdrawn.

The President declared that either Khrushchev did not believe that the United States was serious or the Soviet Union found the existing situation in Berlin so unsatisfactory that it felt compelled to take such drastic action. President Kennedy stated that at his forthcoming meeting with British Prime Minister Macmillan he would have to state his impression that the USSR was presenting him with the alternative of accepting the Soviet Union's action on Berlin or having to face confrontation. He, the President, had come to Vienna to prevent such a confrontation and he therefore regretted that he had to leave Vienna with this impression.

Khrushchev then stated that for the sake of saving prestige one might agree that token contingents of troops, including Soviet troops, could be maintained in West Berlin although not on the basis of occupation rights but of some agreement registered with the United Nations. Khrushchev made it clear, however, that access to Berlin would be subject to control by the GDR. In the course of this particular discussion, Khrushchev asserted that

it was the United States which threatened war, to which the President replied that it was the Soviet Union which wanted to force a change.

Khrushchev's final statement was that the USSR would respond to the challenge; that the calamity of war would be equally shared by all; that the choice of peace and war depended on the United States; that the Soviet Union's decision to sign a peace treaty was irrevocable; and that such a treaty would be signed in December if the United States refused to accept an interim agreement.

Confronted with those threatening remarks of Khrushchev's, the President concluded the conversation with the remark that "it will be a cold winter."¹

3. Soviet Aide-Mémoire of June 4

The aide-mémoire which the Soviet Union presented to President Kennedy on June 4 hardly represented a new proposal by the Soviet Government. In fact, practically all the views expressed in the aide-mémoire could be found in earlier statements of the Soviet position which had been put forward since November 1958. The document, of course, merely stated in more formal terms the Soviet arguments put forward by Khrushchev in his talks with the President. The principal points of the Vienna aide-mémoire were as follows:

The Soviet Union asserted that it was necessary to recognize the situation which had developed in Europe since World War II, "to legalize and to consolidate the inviolability of the existing German borders," and "to normalize the situation in West Berlin" on the basis of the interests of all parties concerned. The Soviet Union therefore advocated the immediate conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany which, it emphasized, was not tied to the "immediate withdrawal of the Federal Republic from NATO", or to the "recognition of the German Democratic Republic or the Federal Republic of Germany by all parties to this treaty." If the United States, however, did not want to sign a joint peace treaty "with the two German states", a

¹Memorandum of conversation between the President and Khrushchev, June 4, 1961, secret.

peaceful settlement could be achieved on the basis of two separate but similar treaties. In that case, the states which had fought Germany would "sign a peace treaty with two German states or with one German state, at their own discretion."

As so often before, the Soviet Union declared that a German peace treaty would normalize the situation in West Berlin, and it again proposed that West Berlin be transformed into a "demilitarized free city" which should be "strictly neutral." The Soviet Union also stated that "token troop contingents" of the three Western Powers and the Soviet Union "could be stationed in West Berlin as guarantors of the free city" and that the USSR would have no objections, either, "to the stationing in West Berlin, for the same purpose, of military contingents from neutral states under the aegis of the U.N." Thus, the Soviet Union proposed that a peace conference be called "immediately, without delay", that a German peace treaty be concluded, and that the problem of West Berlin as a free city be solved.

The Soviet Union also declared that, if the Western Powers were not ready to conclude a peace treaty and solve the problem of West Berlin by making it a free city, "an interim decision could be adopted for a specified period of time." Under such an interim decision the four powers would "appeal to the German States" to come to an agreement "in any form acceptable to them" on problems relating to a German peace settlement and to reunification. The four powers would declare in advance "that they would recognize any agreement achieved by the Germans", and a time limit of six months should be fixed within which the Germans should seek to reach agreement "on problems within their internal competence." If these negotiations between the Germans were successful, "a single German peace treaty would be agreed upon and signed", but if they failed steps would be taken "to conclude a peace treaty with the two German states or with one of them, at the discretion of the States concerned". If the United States did not realize the necessity of concluding a peace treaty, the Soviet Union would sign a peace treaty with those states "that wish to sign it." This peace treaty would "specifically define the status of West Berlin as a free city"; the Soviet Union would observe strictly that status, and measures would be taken" to ensure that this status be respected by other

countries as well." This would mean the end of the "occupation regime" in West Berlin with the result that the use of the communications by land, water, or air "within the territory of the GDR would have to be settled solely by appropriate agreements with the GDR."¹

C. Aftermath of the Kennedy-Khrushchev Meeting

1. First American Evaluation

The Vienna meeting between the President and Khrushchev and the Soviet memorandum handed to the United States left little doubt that the Soviet Union had confronted the West again with the prospect of a serious crisis over Berlin in the near future. In a television and radio report on his trip, President Kennedy told the American people on June 6 that he had spent two very somber days in talking to Khrushchev and that "our most somber talks were on the subject of Germany and Berlin." Similarly, the Department in an instruction of June 8 to all diplomatic and consular posts emphasized the somber nature of the Kennedy-Khrushchev talks and the sharp differences in the views of the two leaders. At the same time, however, the Department pointed out that channels of communication between the two governments had been opened more fully and that chances of a dangerous misjudgment on both sides had now lessened.²

2. British-American Exchange of Views, June 5

On the eve of his return from his European trip, President Kennedy had the opportunity for a personal exchange of views with a major ally of the United States. On June 5 the President discussed with Prime Minister Macmillan and Foreign Secretary Home in London the situation with regard to Berlin in the light of the position taken by the Soviet Union at the Vienna meeting.

¹Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 642-645.

²Documents on Germany, 1944-1961, pp. 646-651; to all diplomatic and consular posts, circ. tel. 1972, June 8, 1961, confidential.

The two sides agreed that Berlin contingency planning should be further developed and that the Western Powers should consider what they should do in the following cases: a) the Soviet Union concludes a separate peace treaty with the GDR without changing existing arrangements regarding Berlin; b) following conclusion of a separate peace treaty, the flow of civilian supplies to Berlin is interrupted; c) following conclusion of a Soviet-GDR peace treaty, the movement of allied military supplies to Berlin is interfered with. President Kennedy emphasized in this connection the need for increasing the stockpiles for the allied forces in Berlin. The President also stated that it would be desirable to decide on the type of military probe to be made in the event of a blockage of surface access and, possibly, also on the organization of an airlift in case the probe force should be turned back.

The British took a more favorable attitude than the President toward the idea that the West should present constructive counterproposals in reply to the Soviet memorandum of June 4. Foreign Secretary Home in particular felt that the Soviet aide-mémoire might have a substantial effect on public opinion since it gave a surface impression of reasonableness. Home therefore believed that it would be difficult to make an entirely negative reply to the memorandum and that the West might perhaps consider presenting concrete counterproposals. Prime Minister Macmillan at one point suggested that one ought perhaps to negotiate something that looked good on paper but also be prepared to react vigorously against any attempt to overturn by force any agreement that had been reached. But when Home spoke of the possibility of exploiting the Soviet proposal with respect to the guarantee of "unobstructed contacts" for West Berliners or a UN presence in Berlin as substitutes for the existing quadripartite arrangements, he himself indicated little faith in the feasibility of such proposals. Macmillan actually expressed agreement with President Kennedy's comment that changes in the existing situation along the lines of Home's suggestions would constitute abandonment of the Western rights in Berlin and probably involve the West in some kind of recognition of the GDR. Macmillan also conceded that after each settlement reached the GDR would continue to insist that the existence of West Berlin was intolerable and that the West therefore might eventually be forced to go to war.

President Kennedy's position was, first of all, that any counterproposals to the Soviet memorandum would have to be agreed to by the French and the West Germans. But more important, he raised the question as to what the West could gain from a new arrangement relating to Berlin; and he pointed to the danger that the West might appear to have accepted defeat.

Macmillan suggested in this connection that a new agreement might provide greater freedom for civilian traffic to Berlin and thus represent an improvement over the existing situation, as the Western Powers actually had no right to insist on the unobstructed flow of civilian supplies to Berlin. The President, however, emphasized that civilian supplies moved into Berlin freely only because of the presence of allied troops and the threat of allied intervention.

The British were in favor of letting the Soviet Union know that the Western Powers had no objection to a Soviet-East German treaty as such--provided there was no change in the Western position with regard to access to Berlin--but that they would meet any attack on their rights with all the force at their command. The President expressed his conviction that only that threat had so far stopped Soviet action against Western rights in Berlin. He stressed, however, that as a result of recent developments in Laos "and elsewhere" the West might have become weaker in the view of the Russians. Moreover, the President said, the Russians knew that they were stronger than at the time of the Berlin blockade twelve years before, yet even then the Western Powers did not force their way into Berlin, despite the fact that they had a nuclear monopoly.

Finally, Foreign Secretary Home expressed the view that Khrushchev might be forced into taking some action with regard to Berlin by his difficulties with the GDR and other Soviet satellites, particularly by the steady influx of refugees into West Berlin.¹

¹Memorandum from Bundy (White House) to Battle (S/S) with enclosures, "Note of Points During the Discussion Between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan at Admiralty House, 10:30 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., June 5, 1961"; "Record of Conversation at Admiralty House, 12:45 p.m., June 5, 1961"; all top secret. These notes and memoranda of President Kennedy's discussions in London were based on British drafts which were revised in Washington in accordance with the President's instructions.

The President's talks with the British gave, as it were, a concentrated survey of the complex of problems with which the new Khrushchev ultimatum had presented the Western alliance. As in the case of the first Khrushchev ultimatum of November 1958, the West was faced with the need to re-examine the diplomatic, propagandist, and military aspects of the Berlin problem in order to meet the new threat. The immediate task before the Western Powers was to give a reply to the Soviet aide-mémoire that would put the Western case effectively before world public opinion and convey to the Soviet Union the determination of the Western Powers in the defense of their rights in Berlin, while at the same time keeping open avenues to reasonable negotiations on the problems of Berlin and Germany. The most pressing need confronting the Western Powers, of course, was to continue and speed up review of their contingency planning with respect to Berlin so as to be in a position to respond to any threat to Western access and at the same time to deter the Soviet Union from creating such a threat as a result of a peace treaty with the GDR. Finally, the prospects of an early diplomatic and, possibly, military confrontation with the Soviet Union, in the course of which both sides might be forced to the conference table, made it highly advisable for the Western Powers to re-examine their basic negotiating position on Berlin and Germany.

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