

The Berlin Ultimatum (November 27, 1958)

Abstract

On November 27, 1958, the Soviet foreign ministry followed up on Khrushchev's November 10th address by issuing a note to the governments of the three Western Allies. This note, now known as the Berlin Ultimatum, recounts prewar developments, Allied cooperation during the war, and Allied relations in the postwar period from the Soviet perspective. It accuses the U.S., Great Britain, and France of gross violations of the provisions of various Four-Power agreements, primarily the Potsdam Agreement. In violating these provisions, the Soviet government argues, the Allies forfeited their right to maintain a presence in Berlin. The note gave the Allies six months to demilitarize West Berlin and declare it a "free city." Fourteen years earlier, all four Allies had agreed to the joint administration of the capital of Berlin in accordance with the "Protocol on Zones of Occupation and the Administration of "Greater Berlin" of September 12, 1944," which ensured both a Soviet and a Western presence. In the Berlin Ultimatum, the Soviet government announces that it views this agreement as "null and void."

Source

Note from the Soviet Foreign Ministry to the American Ambassador at Moscow (Thompson), Regarding Berlin, November 27, 1958

The Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics addresses the Government of the United States of America as one of the signatory powers of the Potsdam Agreement on the urgent question of the status of Berlin.

The problem of Berlin, which is situated in the center of the German Democratic Republic but whose western part is cut off from the GDR as a result of foreign occupation, deeply affects not only the national interests of the German people but also the interests of all nations desirous of establishing lasting peace in Europe. Here in the historic capital of Germany two worlds are in direct contact and the barricades of the "cold war" tower at every turn. A situation of constant friction and tension has prevailed for many years in this city, which is divided into two parts. Berlin, which witnessed the greatest triumph of the joint struggle of our countries against Fascist aggression, has now become a dangerous center of contradiction between the Great Powers, allies in the last war. Its role in the relations between the Powers may be compared to a smoldering fuse that has been connected to a powder keg. Incidents arising here, even if they seem to be of local significance, may, in an atmosphere of heated passions, suspicion, and mutual apprehensions, cause a conflagration that will be difficult to extinguish. This is the sad pass to which has come, after the 13 postwar years, the once joint and concerted policy of the Four Powers – the U.S.S.R., the United States, Great Britain, and France – with regard to Germany.

To assess correctly the real importance of the Berlin problem confronting us today and to determine the existing possibilities for normalizing the situation in Berlin, it is necessary to recall the development of the policy of the Powers party to the anti-Hitler coalition with respect to Germany.

It is common knowledge that the USA, as well as Great Britain and France, by no means immediately came to the conclusion that it was essential to establish cooperation with the Soviet Union for the purpose of counteracting Hitlerite aggression, although the Soviet Government constantly indicated its readiness to do so. In the capitals of the Western states opposite tendencies prevailed for a long time, and they became especially marked in the period of the Munich deal with Hitler. Entertaining the hope of controlling German militarism and of pushing it eastward, the governments of the Western Powers

tolerated and encouraged the policy of blackmail and threats pursued by Hitler and acts of direct aggression by Hitlerite Germany and its ally, Fascist Italy, against a number of peace-loving states.

It was only when Fascist Germany, upsetting the shortsighted calculations of the inspirers of Munich, turned against the Western Powers, when Hitler's army started moving westward, crushing Denmark, Norway, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and toppling France, that the governments of the USA and Great Britain had no alternative but to admit their miscalculations and embark upon the path of organizing, jointly with the Soviet Union, resistance to Fascist Germany, Italy, and Japan. Had the Western Powers followed a more farsighted policy, such cooperation between the Soviet Union, the USA, Great Britain, and France could have been established much sooner, in the first years after Hitler seized power in Germany and then there would have been no occupation of France, no Dunkirk, no Pearl Harbor. Then it would have been possible to save millions of human lives sacrificed by the peoples of the Soviet Union, Poland, Yugoslavia, France, Britain, Czechoslovakia, the USA, Greece, Norway, and other countries to curb the aggressors.

The creation of the anti-Hitler coalition is a fact without precedent in modern history, if only because states with different social systems united in a defensive and just war against the common enemy. The Soviet Government highly reveres the concord of nations that took shape in the struggle against Fascism and was sealed by the blood of the freedom-loving peoples. The Soviet people would like to preserve and develop the feelings of trust and friendship that marked their relations with the peoples of the USA, Britain, France, and the other countries of the anti-Hitler coalition during the grim years of the last war.

When the peoples were celebrating victory over Hitlerite Germany, a conference of the heads of government of the Soviet Union, the USA, and Great Britain was held in Potsdam in order to work out a joint policy with respect to post-war Germany. The Potsdam Agreement, to which France acceded soon after it was signed, generalized the historical experience of the struggle waged by the peoples to prevent aggression by German militarism. The entire content of this agreement was directed toward creating conditions precluding the possibility of yet another attack by Germany against peace-loving states, toward preventing German militarists from unleashing another world war so that Germany, having abandoned forever the mirage of a policy of conquest, might make a firm start on the road to peaceful development.

Expressing the will of the peoples who made untold sacrifices for the sake of crushing the Hitlerite aggressors, the governments of the Four Powers solemnly undertook to eradicate German militarism and Nazism, to prevent forever their revival, and to take all steps to ensure that Germany would never again threaten its neighbors or the preservation of world peace. The participants in the Potsdam Conference expressed their determination to prevent any Fascist and militaristic activity or propaganda. They also undertook to permit and encourage all democratic political parties in Germany.

For purposes of destroying the economic foundation of German militarism, it was decided to eliminate excessive concentration in Germany's economy, represented in the form of cartels, syndicates, trusts, and other monopolies, which ensured the assumption of power by Fascism and the preparation and carrying out of Hitlerite aggression.

The Potsdam Agreement contained important provisions whereby Germany was to be regarded as a single economic entity, even during the occupation period. The agreement also provided for the creation of central German administrative departments. The Council of Foreign Ministers, established by a decision of the Potsdam Conference, was instructed to prepare a peace settlement for Germany.

The implementation of all these measures should have enabled the German people to effect a fundamental reconstruction of their life and to ensure the creation of a mild, peace-loving, democratic German state.

Such are the main provisions of the Potsdam Agreement, which ensured an equitable combination of the interests both of the nations that had fought against Germany and of the fundamental interests of the German people themselves, and at the same time created a sound basis for carrying out a joint policy by the Four Powers concerning the German question, and, hence, for extensive and fruitful cooperation between them in European matters in general. However, further developments deviated a great deal from the direction mapped out at Potsdam. Relations between the USSR and the Three Western Powers kept deteriorating. Mutual distrust and suspicion kept growing and have now developed into unfriendly relations.

The Soviet Government sincerely hoped that after the victorious end of the war it would be quite possible, notwithstanding all the inevitability of ideological differences, to continue the fruitful cooperation between the Great Powers that headed the anti-Hitler coalition, on the basis of sober recognition of the situation resulting from the war.

The policy of the Western Powers, however, was increasingly influenced by forces obsessed with hatred for Socialist and Communist ideas but which concealed during the war their hostile designs against the Soviet Union. As a result, the course was set in the West toward the utmost aggravation of the ideological struggle headed by aggressive leaders, opponents of the peaceful coexistence of states. The signal for this was given to the United States and to other Western countries by W. Churchill in his notorious Fulton speech in March 1946.

The conflict between the two ideologies – a struggle of minds and convictions – in itself could not have been particularly detrimental to relations between states. The ideological struggle has never abated, and it will continue so long as there are different views on the structure of society. But, unfortunately, the pronouncements of W. Churchill and those who share his views influenced the minds of other Western statesmen, which had the most regrettable consequences. Governmental bodies and the armed forces joined in the ideological struggle that blazed forth. The results are universally known. Instead of developing cooperation between the major Great Powers, the world was split into opposing military alignments, and competition began in the manufacture and stockpiling of atomic and hydrogen weapons. In other words, war preparations were launched. The Soviet Government deeply regrets that events took such a turn, since this prejudices the cause of peace and runs counter to the natural desire of peoples for peaceful coexistence and friendly cooperation. There was a time when the leaders of the USA and Great Britain, in particular Franklin D. Roosevelt, the outstanding American statesman, reflecting the sentiments of the mass of the people, proclaimed the necessity of creating such a system of mutual relations between states under which the nations would feel secure and people everywhere could live all their lives without fear.

A particularly drastic change in relations between the USA, as well as Britain and France, and the Soviet Union occurred when those powers shifted to pursuing a policy in Germany that ran counter to the Potsdam Agreement. The first violation of the Potsdam Agreement was the refusal by the governments of the USA, Great Britain, and France to honor their commitments under the aforesaid agreement regarding the transfer to the Soviet Union of the agreed amount of industrial equipment from West Germany, in partial compensation for the destruction and damage inflicted upon the national economy of the USSR by the aggression of Hitlerite Germany.

But the matter did not end there. With every passing year the governments of the USA and Great Britain drifted farther and farther away from the principles underlying the Potsdam Agreement. The same road was followed by France which, although it acceded to the Potsdam Agreement later, cannot, of course, disclaim its share of the responsibility for carrying out this agreement.

Having embarked upon the restoration of the military and economic potential of West Germany, the Western Powers revived and strengthened the very forces that had forged Hitler's war machine. Had the

Western Powers honored the Potsdam Agreement they would have prevented the German militarists from regaining their positions, checked *revanche* tendencies, and not permitted Germany to create an army and an industry manufacturing the means of destruction. However, it is a known fact that the governments of the Three Powers not only failed to do this but, on the contrary, sanctioned the creation of a West German army and are encouraging the arming of the Federal Republic of Germany, disregarding the commitments made at Potsdam. Moreover, they included West Germany in the North Atlantic bloc, which was created behind the back of the Soviet Union and, as everyone is aware, against it, and are now arming West Germany with atomic and rocket weapons.

It is evident that the bitter lessons of the murderous war have been lost on certain Western statesmen, who are once again dragging out the notorious Munich policy of inciting German militarism against the Soviet Union, their recent comrade in arms.

The legitimate question arises as to whether the very promoters of the present Western policy with respect to Germany can guarantee that the German militarism nurtured by them will not once again turn against its present partners and that the American, British, and French peoples will not have to pay with their blood for the violation by the governments of the Three Western Powers of the Allied agreements on the peaceful and democratic development of Germany.

It is doubtful whether anyone can give such guarantees.

The policy of the USA, Britain, and France with respect to West Germany has led to the violation of those provisions of the Potsdam Agreement designed to ensure the unity of Germany as a peace-loving and democratic state. And when a separate state, the Federal Republic of Germany, was set up independently [of the Soviet Union] in West Germany, which was occupied by the troops of the Three Powers, East Germany, where forces determined not to allow the German people to be plunged once again into disaster assumed the leadership, had no alternative but to create in its turn an independent state.

Thus, two states came into being in Germany. Whereas West Germany, whose development was directed by the United States, Britain, and France, established a government with representatives who do not conceal their hatred for the Soviet Union and who often openly advertise the similarity of their aspirations to the plans of the Hitlerite aggressors, East Germany formed a government that has irrevocably broken with Germany's aggressive past. State and public affairs in the German Democratic Republic are governed by a constitution fully in keeping with the principles of the Potsdam Agreement and the finest progressive traditions of the German nation. The rule of monopolies and Junkers has been abolished forever in the GDR. Nazism has been eradicated and a number of other social and economic reforms have been carried out, which have destroyed the basis for the revival of militarism and have made the German Democratic Republic an important factor of peace in Europe. The Government of the GDR has solemnly proclaimed that it will fulfill, to the letter, its commitments under the Potsdam Agreement which, incidentally, the Government of the FRG obstinately evades.

The inclusion of the FRG in the North Atlantic bloc compelled the Soviet Union to adopt countermeasures, in as much as the commitments binding the Soviet Union, the United States, Great Britain, and France were broken by the Three Western Powers, which united with West Germany, and previously with Italy, against the Soviet Union, which had borne the brunt of the struggle against the Fascist aggressors. That closed military alignment created an equal threat to other countries as well. Such a situation compelled the Soviet Union, as well as a number of other European countries that were victims of aggression by German and Italian Fascism, to establish their own defensive organization, concluding for this purpose the Warsaw Treaty, to which the GDR also acceded.

There is only one conclusion to be drawn from the foregoing: The Potsdam Agreement has been grossly

violated by the Western Powers. It is like the trunk of a tree, once mighty and fruitful, but now cut down and with its heart taken out. The lofty goals for which the Potsdam Agreement was concluded have long since been renounced by the Western Powers, and what they are actually doing in Germany is diametrically opposed to what the Potsdam Agreement had envisaged. The crux of the matter is not, of course, that the social and political systems of the GDR and the FRG are basically different. The Soviet Government considers that the solution of the question of social structure of both German states is the concern of the Germans themselves. The Soviet Union stands for complete noninterference in the internal affairs of the German people or in those of any other people. But the GDR's movement towards socialism has given rise to the enmity and profound hostility of the Federal Government toward it – which finds full support and encouragement by the NATO members, and, above all, the United States.

The Government of the FRG, encouraged by the Western Powers, is systematically fanning the “cold war,” and its leaders have repeatedly stated that the FRG would pursue the policy “from a position of strength,” i.e., a policy of dictation to the other German state. Thus, the Government of the FRG does not want a peaceful unification of the German people, who are living in two states under different social systems, but is nurturing plans for abolishing the GDR and strengthening at the latter's expense its own militaristic state.

The Soviet Government fully understands the position of the German Democratic Republic, which does not want to see the democratic and social gains of the German working people destroyed, the property of capitalists and landlords restored, the land, plants, and factories taken away from the people, and the GDR subjected to a militarist regime. The recent elections for the People's Chamber and local bodies of the German Democratic Republic are yet another striking indication that the population of the GDR unanimously supports the policy of its Government, which is aimed at preserving peace and reuniting Germany on a peaceful and democratic basis, and is fully determined to defend its Socialist gains. The Soviet Union expresses complete solidarity with the GDR, which is firmly defending its lawful rights.

If one is to face the truth, one should recognize that other countries are not too eager either to support the plans of the Government of the FRG for unifying Germany by force. And this is understandable, since peoples including those of France and Great Britain, are still smarting from the wounds inflicted on them by Hitlerite Germany.

Traces of the last war are far from erased from French towns and villages. The ruins left in the capital and in many cities of Great Britain after the bombings by Nazi planes have not yet been removed, and millions of Britons cannot forget the tragic fate of Coventry. The peoples that were subjected to occupation by the Hitlerite army fully understand these feelings. They lost millions of men and women killed or tortured to death, and saw thousands of cities destroyed and villages burned on their soil. The Soviet people will never forget what happened to Stalingrad, nor will the Poles ever forget the fate of Warsaw, nor the Czechoslovak people that of Lidice. American families also came to know the grief of losing their kith and kin. Germany twice unleashed world wars and in both cases dragged into them the United States of America, whose sons were compelled to shed their blood in lands thousands of miles away from American shores.

Mindful of all this, the peoples cannot and will not permit the unification of Germany on a militaristic basis.

There is another program for uniting Germany, which is advocated by the German Democratic Republic. This is a program for uniting Germany as a peace-loving and democratic state, and it cannot fail to be welcomed by the peoples. There is but one way to put it into effect, that is, through agreement and contracts between the two German states and through the establishment of a German confederation. The implementation of this proposal would, without affecting the social structures of the GDR and the FRG, direct into the single channel of a peaceful policy the efforts of their governments and parliaments

and would ensure a gradual rapprochement and merger of the two German states.

The Soviet Union, as well as other states interested in strengthening the peace in Europe, supports the proposals of the German Democratic Republic for the peaceful unification of Germany. The Government of the USSR regrets that none of the efforts made in this direction has as yet produced any positive results, since the governments of the United States and other NATO members, and, above all, the Government of the FRG, do not, in fact, display any concern either for the conclusion of a peace treaty or for the unification of Germany.

Consequently, the policy pursued by the United States, Great Britain, and France, directed as it is toward the militarization of West Germany and toward involving it in the military bloc of the Western Powers, has also prevented the enforcement of those provisions of the Potsdam Agreement that pertain to Germany's unity.

Actually, of all the Allied agreements on Germany, only one is being carried out today. It is the agreement on the so-called quadripartite status of Berlin. On the basis of that status, the Three Western Powers are ruling the roost in West Berlin, turning it into a kind of state within a state and using it as a center from which to pursue subversive activity against the GDR, the Soviet Union, and the other parties to the Warsaw Treaty. The United States, Great Britain, and France are freely communicating with West Berlin through lines of communication passing through the territory and the airspace of the German Democratic Republic, which they do not even want to recognize.

The governments of the Three Powers are seeking to keep in force the long-since obsolete part of the wartime agreements that governed the occupation of Germany and entitled them in the past to stay in Berlin. At the same time, as stated above, the Western Powers have grossly violated the Four-Power agreements, including the Potsdam Agreement, which is the most concentrated expression of the obligations of the Powers with respect to Germany. Moreover, the Four-Power agreements on the occupation of Germany, which the governments of the USA, Great Britain, and France invoke in support of their rights in West Berlin, were approved by the Potsdam Agreement or adopted for its implementation. In other words, the Three Powers are demanding, for their own sake, the preservation of the occupation privileges based on those Four-Power agreements, which they themselves have violated.

If the USA, Great Britain, and France are indeed staying in Berlin by virtue of the right stemming from the aforementioned international agreements and, primarily, from the Potsdam Agreement, this implies their duty to abide by these agreements. Those who have grossly violated these agreements have lost the right to maintain their occupation regime in Berlin or any other part of Germany. Furthermore, is it possible to insist on the occupation regime being maintained in Germany or in any part thereof for more than 13 years after the end of the war? For, any occupation is an event of limited duration, which is expressly stipulated in the Four-Power agreements on Germany.

It is well known that the conventional way to put an end to occupation is for the parties that were at war to conclude a peace treaty offering the defeated country the conditions necessary for the re-establishment of normal life.

The fact that Germany still has no peace treaty is the fault primarily of the governments of the USA, Britain, and France, which have never seemed to be in sympathy with the idea of drafting such a treaty. It is known that the governments of the Three Powers reacted negatively to every approach the Soviet Government has made to them regarding the preparation of a peace treaty with Germany.

At present, the USA, Great Britain, and France are opposed, as follows from their notes of September 30 of this year, to the latest proposals for a peaceful settlement with Germany put forward by the Soviet

Union and the GDR, while making no proposals of their own on this question, just as they have made none throughout the postwar period. As a matter of fact, the last note of the US Government is a restatement of the position that proved to be utterly unrealistic, whereby Germany's national unity is to be re-established by the USSR, the USA, Great Britain, and France rather than by the German states that are to unite. It also follows from the US Government's note that it is once again avoiding negotiations with the Soviet Union and the other interested states for the purpose of preparing a peace treaty with Germany. The result is a veritable vicious circle: The US Government is objecting to the drafting of a German peace treaty by referring to the absence of a united German state while at the same time hampering the reunification of Germany by rejecting the only real possibility of solving this problem through agreement between the two German states.

Is it not because the Western Powers would like to prolong indefinitely their privileges in West Germany and the occupation regime in West Berlin that they take this position on the question of drafting a peace treaty? It is becoming increasingly clear that such is the actual state of affairs.

The Soviet Government reaffirms its readiness to participate at any time in negotiations to draft a peace treaty with Germany. However, the absence of a peace treaty can by no means be an excuse now for attempting to maintain the occupation regime anywhere in Germany.

The occupation period in Germany has long since become a thing of the past and any attempts to prevent the disappearance of special rights of foreign powers in Germany are becoming a dangerous anachronism. The occupation regime in Germany has never been an end in itself. It was established to help the healthy forces of the German nation to build their own new peace-loving and democratic state on the ruins of a militaristic Germany.

Desirous of living in peace and friendship with the entire German people, the Soviet Union has established and is maintaining normal diplomatic relations with both German states. Close friendly relations bind the Soviet Union to the German Democratic Republic. These relations were embodied in the treaty concluded between the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic on September 20, 1955. In accordance with this treaty, relations between the two states are based on complete equality of rights, respect for each other's sovereignty, and noninterference in each other's internal affairs. The Soviet Government proceeds from the same principles in its relations with the other German state – the Federal Republic of Germany.

On their part, the governments of the USA, Great Britain, and France proclaimed an end to the occupation regime in the territory of the FRG, which had been under their control and administration when they signed the Paris agreements. The Four-Power status of Berlin came into being because Berlin, as the capital of Germany, was designated as the seat of the Control Council established for Germany's administration during the initial period of occupation. This status has been scrupulously observed by the Soviet Union up to the present time, although the Control Council ceased to exist as early as ten years ago and there have been two capitals in Germany for a long time. As for the USA, Great Britain, and France, they have chosen to abuse in a flagrant manner their occupation rights in Berlin and have exploited the Four-Power status of the city for their own purposes to the detriment of the Soviet Union, the German Democratic Republic, and the other Socialist countries.

At one time, the agreement on the Four-Power status of Berlin was an agreement providing for equal rights of the Four Powers, which was concluded for peaceful democratic purposes, which purposes later became known as the Potsdam principles. At that time, this agreement met the requirements of the day and was in accordance with the interests of all its signatories – the USSR, the USA, Great Britain, and France. Now that the Western Powers have begun to arm West Germany and turn it into an instrument of their policy directed against the Soviet Union, the very essence of this erstwhile Allied agreement on Berlin has disappeared. It was violated by three of its signatories, who began using it against the fourth

signatory, i.e., against the Soviet Union. It would be ridiculous to expect that in such a situation the Soviet Union or any other self-respecting state in its place would pretend not to notice the changes that have occurred.

An obviously absurd situation has thus arisen, in which the Soviet Union seems to be supporting and maintaining favorable conditions for the Western Powers in their activities against the Soviet Union and its Allies under the Warsaw Treaty.

It is obvious that the Soviet Union, just as the other parties to the Warsaw Treaty, cannot tolerate such a situation any longer. For the occupation regime in West Berlin to continue would be tantamount to recognizing something like a privileged position of the NATO countries, for which there is, of course, no reason whatsoever.

It is hardly possible seriously to believe that the Soviet Union will help the forces of aggression to develop subversive activities, much less to prepare an attack on Socialist countries. It should be clear for anybody with common sense that the Soviet Union cannot maintain a situation in West Berlin that is detrimental to its lawful interests, its security, and the security of other Socialist countries. It would be well to bear in mind that the Soviet Union is not a Jordan or an Iran and will never tolerate any methods of pressure upon it for the purpose of imposing conditions advantageous to the opposing NATO military bloc. But this is precisely what the Western Powers are trying to get the Soviet Union to endorse in their attempts to retain their rights of occupants in West Berlin.

Can the Soviet Union disregard all these facts, which affect the vital security interests of the Soviet Union, of its ally – the German Democratic Republic – and of all the member states of the Warsaw Defense Treaty? Of course not! The Soviet Government can no longer consider itself bound by that part of the Allied agreements on Germany that has assumed an inequitable character and is being used for the purpose of maintaining the occupation regime in West Berlin and interfering in the internal affairs of the GDR.

In this connection, the Government of the USSR hereby notifies the United States Government that the Soviet Union regards as null and void the “Protocol of the Agreement between the Governments of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom on the zones of occupation in Germany and on the administration of Greater Berlin,” of September 12, 1944, and the related supplementary agreements, including the agreement on the control machinery in Germany, concluded between the governments of the USSR, the USA, Great Britain, and France on May 1, 1945, i.e., the agreements that were intended to be in effect during the first years after the capitulation of Germany.

It is easy to see that all the Soviet Government is doing by making this statement is to recognize the actual state of affairs, which consists in the fact that the USA, Great Britain, and France have long since rejected the essentials of the treaties and agreements concluded during the war against Hitler Germany and after its defeat. The Soviet Government is doing no more than drawing conclusions that inevitably ensue for the Soviet Union from this actual state of affairs.

Pursuant to the foregoing and proceeding from the principle of respect for the sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic, the Soviet Government will enter into negotiations with the Government of the GDR at an appropriate time with a view to transferring to the German Democratic Republic the functions temporarily performed by the Soviet authorities by virtue of the above-mentioned Allied agreements and under the agreement between the USSR and the GDR of September 20, 1955. The best way to solve the Berlin problem would undoubtedly be to adopt a decision based on the enforcement of the Potsdam Agreement on Germany. But this is possible only in the event that the three Western Powers return to a policy in German affairs that would be pursued jointly with the USSR and in conformity with the spirit and principles of the Potsdam Agreement. In the present circumstances this would mean the

withdrawal of the Federal Republic of Germany from NATO with the simultaneous withdrawal of the German Democratic Republic from the Warsaw Treaty [organization], and an agreement whereby, in accordance with the principles of the Potsdam Agreement, neither of the two German states would have any armed forces except those needed to maintain law and order at home and guard the frontiers.

Should the Government of the United States be unwilling to contribute in such a way to the implementation of the political principles of the Allied agreements on Germany, it will have no reason, either legal or moral, for insisting on the preservation of the Four-Power status of Berlin. Some ill-wishers of the Soviet Union may of course try to interpret the position of the Soviet Government in the question of the occupation regime in Berlin as the striving for some sort of annexation. It goes without saying that such an interpretation has nothing in common with reality. The Soviet Union, just as the other Socialist states, has no territorial claims. In its policy, it is firmly guided by the principle of condemning annexation, i.e., the seizure of foreign territories and forced annexation of foreign peoples. This principle was proclaimed by Lenin, the founder of the Soviet state, as far back as the first days of Soviet power in Russia.

The USSR does not seek any conquests. All it wants is to put an end to the abnormal and dangerous situation that has developed in Berlin because of the continued occupation of its western sectors by the USA, Great Britain, and France.

An independent solution to the Berlin problem must be found in the very near future since the Western Powers refuse to take part in the preparation of a peace treaty with Germany and the Government of the FRG, supported by the same powers, is pursuing a policy hampering the unification of Germany. It is necessary to prevent West Berlin from being used any longer as a springboard for intensive espionage, sabotage, and other subversive activities against Socialist countries, the GDR, and the USSR or, to quote the leaders of the United States Government, to prevent its being used for "indirect aggression" against the countries of the Socialist camp.

Essentially speaking, the only interest the United States, Great Britain, and France have in West Berlin consists in using this "frontline city," as it is vociferously called in the West, as a vantage point from which to carry on hostile activities against the socialist countries. The Western powers gain nothing else from their stay in Berlin as occupants. The ending of the illegal occupation of West Berlin would cause no harm whatever, either to the United States or to Great Britain or France. It would, on the other hand, substantially improve the international atmosphere in Europe and set peoples' minds at rest in all countries.

On the contrary, the Western powers' insistence on continuing their occupation of West Berlin would lead to the conclusion that the matter is not confined to "indirect aggression" against the GDR and the Soviet Union, and that some other plans are apparently being kept in view for an even more dangerous use of West Berlin.

The Soviet Government makes this overture to the Government of the USA, guided by the desire to achieve a relaxation of international tension; to put an end to the state of "cold war" and pave the way for the restoration of good relations between the Soviet Union and the United States, as well as Great Britain and France; to clear away everything that gives rise to clashes and quarrels between our countries; and to reduce the number of causes leading to conflicts. Indeed, one cannot escape the fact that West Berlin, in its present status, is just such a source of discord and suspicion between our countries.

Of course, the most correct and natural way to solve the problem would be for the western part of Berlin, now actually detached from the GDR, to be reunited with its eastern part and for Berlin to become a unified city within the state in whose territory it is situated.

However, the Soviet Government, taking into account the present unrealistic policy of the USA as well as of Great Britain and France with respect to the German Democratic Republic, cannot but foresee the difficulties the Western powers have in contributing to such a solution of the Berlin problem. At the same time, it is guided by the concern that the process of liquidating the occupation regime may not involve any painful break in the established way of life of the West Berlin population.

One cannot of course fail to take into account the fact that the political and economic development of West Berlin during the period of its occupation by the three Western powers has progressed in a different direction from the development of East Berlin and the GDR, as a result of which the way of life in the two parts of Berlin are at the present time entirely different. The Soviet Government considers that when the foreign occupation is ended the population of West Berlin must be granted the right to have whatever way of life it wishes for itself. If the inhabitants of West Berlin desire to preserve the present way of life, based on private capitalistic ownership, that is up to them. The USSR, for its part, would respect any choice of the West Berliners in this matter.

In view of all these considerations, the Soviet Government on its part would consider it possible to solve the West Berlin question at the present time by the conversion of West Berlin into an independent political unit – a free city, without any state, including both existing German states, interfering in its life. Specifically, it might be possible to agree that the territory of the free city be demilitarized and that no armed forces be contained therein. The free city, West Berlin, could have its own government and run its own economic, administrative, and other affairs.

The Four Powers which shared in the administration of Berlin after the war could, as well as both of the German states, undertake to respect the status of West Berlin as a free city, just as was done, for instance, by the Four Powers with respect to the neutral status which was adopted by the Austrian Republic.

For its part, the Soviet Government would have no objection to the United Nations also sharing, in one way or other, in observing the free-city status of West Berlin.

It is obvious that, considering the specific position of West Berlin, which lies within the territory of the GDR and is cut off from the outside world, the question would arise of some kind of arrangement with the German Democratic Republic concerning guarantees of unhindered communications between the free city and the outside world – both to the East and to the West – with the object of free movement of passenger and freight traffic. In its turn West Berlin would undertake not to permit on its territory any hostile subversive activity directed against the GDR or any other state.

The above-mentioned solution of the problem of West Berlin's status would be an important step toward normalizing the situation in Berlin, which, instead of being a hotbed of unrest and tension, could become a center for contacts and cooperation between both parts of Germany in the interest of her peaceful future and the unity of the German nation.

The establishment of free-city status for West Berlin would firmly ensure the development of West Berlin's economy, due to its contacts on all sides with the states of the East and the West, and would ensure a decent standard of living for the city's population. For its part, the Soviet Union states that it would contribute in every way toward the achievement of these ends, in particular by placing orders for industrial goods and amounts that would fully ensure the stability and prosperity of the free city's economy, and by regular deliveries on a commercial basis of the necessary quantities of new materials and food stuffs to West Berlin. Thus, by the liquidation of the occupation regime, not only would the more than two million people of West Berlin not be harmed but on the contrary they would have every opportunity to raise their living standard.

In case the Government of the USA and the governments of Great Britain and France express their agreement to consider the question of liquidating the present occupation regime in West Berlin by setting up a free city within its territory, the Soviet Government would be willing on behalf of the Four Powers to enter into official contact on this matter with the government of the German Democratic Republic, with which it has already had preliminary consultations prior to the sending of the present note.

Naturally, it would also be realized that the GDR's agreement to set up on its territory such an independent political organism as a free city of West Berlin would be a concession, a definite sacrifice on the part of the GDR for the sake of strengthening peace in Europe, and for the sake of the national interest of the German people as a whole.

The Soviet Government, guided by a desire to normalize the situation in Berlin in the interest of European peace and in the interest of a peaceful and independent development of Germany, has resolved to effect measures on its part designed to liquidate the occupation regime in Berlin. It hopes that the Government of the USA will show a proper understanding of these motives and make a realistic approach to the Berlin question.

At the same time the Soviet Government is prepared to enter into negotiations with the governments of the United States of America and with those of the other states concerned on granting West Berlin the status of a demilitarized free city. In case this proposal is not acceptable to the government of the USA then there will no longer remain any topic for negotiations between the former occupying powers on the Berlin question.

The Soviet Government seeks to have the necessary change in Berlin's situation take place in a cold atmosphere, without haste and unnecessary friction, with maximum possible consideration for the interests of the parties concerned. Obviously, a certain period of time will be necessary for the powers which occupied Germany after the defeat of Hitler's Wehrmacht to agree on proclaiming West Berlin a free city provided, naturally, that the Western powers display due interest in this proposal.

It should also be taken into consideration that the necessity may arise for talks between the municipal authorities of both parts of Berlin and also between the GDR and the FRG to settle any questions that may arise. In view of this, the Soviet Government proposes to make no changes in the present procedure for military traffic of the USA, Great Britain, and France from West Berlin to the FRG for half a year. It regards such a period as fully sufficient to provide a sound basis for the solution of the questions connected with the change in Berlin's situation and to prevent a possibility of any complications, provided, naturally, that the governments of the Western powers do not deliberately seek such complications. During the above-mentioned period the parties will have an opportunity to prove in practice their desire to ease international tension by settling the Berlin question.

If the above-mentioned period is not utilized to reach an adequate agreement, the Soviet Union will then carry out the planned measures through an agreement with the GDR. It is envisaged that the German Democratic Republic, like any other independent state, must fully deal with questions concerning its space, i.e., exercise its sovereignty on land, on water, and in the air. At the same time, there will terminate all contacts still maintained between representatives of the armed forces and other officials of the Soviet Union in Germany and corresponding representatives of the armed forces and other officials of the USA, Great Britain, and France on questions pertaining to Berlin.

Voices are raised in the capitals of some Western powers that those powers do not recognize the Soviet Union's decision to relinquish its part in the maintenance of the occupation status in Berlin. But how can one place the question on such a level? He who today speaks of nonrecognition of the steps planned by the Soviet Union Obviously would like to talk with the latter not in the language of reason and well-

founded arguments but in the language of brute force, forgetting that the Soviet people are not affected by threats and intimidation. If behind the words about, “nonrecognition” there really lies the intention to resort to force and drag the world into a war over Berlin, the advocates of such a policy should realize that they assume a very grave responsibility for all its consequences before all nations and before history. Those who indulge in sabre-rattling in connection with the situation in Berlin are once again betraying their interests in preserving for aggressive purposes the occupation regime in Berlin.

The Government of the Soviet Union would like to hope that the problem of normalizing the situation in Berlin, which life itself raises before our states as a natural necessity, will in any case be solved in accordance with considerations of statesmanship, the interests of peace between peoples, without the unnecessary nervous strain and intensification of a “cold war.”

Methods of blackmail and reckless threats of force will be least of all appropriate in solving such a problem as the Berlin question. Such methods will not help solve a single question, but can only bring the situation to the danger point. But only madmen can go to the length of unleashing another world war over the preservation of privileges of occupiers in West Berlin. If such madmen should really appear, there is no doubt that strait jackets could be found for them. If the statesmen responsible for the policy of the Western powers are guided by feelings of hatred for communism and the socialist countries in their approach to the Berlin question as well as other international problems, no good will come out of it. Neither the Soviet Union nor any other small socialist state can or will deny its existence precisely as a socialist state. That is why, having united in an unbreakable fraternal alliance, they firmly stand in defense of their rights and their state frontiers, acting according to the motto – one for all and all for one. Any violation of the frontiers of the German Democratic Republic, Poland, or Czechoslovakia, any aggressive action against any member state of the Warsaw Treaty will be regarded by all its participants as an act of aggression against them all and will immediately cause appropriate retaliation.

The Soviet Government believes that it would be sensible to recognize the situation prevailing in the world and to create normal relations for the co-existence of all states, to develop international trade, to build relations between our countries on the basis of the well-known principles of mutual respect for one another's sovereignty and territorial integrity, nonaggression, non-interference in one another's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit.

The Soviet Union and its people and government are sincerely striving for the restoration of good relations with the United States of America, relations based on trust, which are quite feasible as shown by the experience in the joint struggle against the Hitlerite aggressors, and which in peacetime would hold out to our countries nothing but, the advantages of mutually enriched spiritual and material cooperation between our peoples, and to all other people the blessings of a tranquil life under conditions of an enduring peace.

Source: Note from the Soviet Foreign Ministry to the American Ambassador at Moscow (Thompson), Regarding Berlin (November 27, 1958); reprinted in *Documents on Germany, 1944–1959: Background Documents on Germany, 1944–1959, and a Chronology of Political Developments affecting Berlin, 1945–1956*. Washington, DC: General Printing Office, 1959, pp. 317–31. [With slight edits to the translation by GHDI staff.]

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