

Three Telegrams from U.S. High Commissioner John McCloy to Secretary of State Dean Acheson regarding the “Stalin Note” (1952)

Abstract

Adenauer’s reaction to the “Stalin Note” and to American efforts to ascertain his position offers good insight into the chancellor’s overall strategy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union and the GDR. He was aware that the population still had great hopes for reunification and that his integration policy, preferential toward the West, decreased the chances of attaining national unity. Nevertheless, he saw no alternative to the alliance – above all to the alliance with the U.S. In his opinion, following a Western path was the only way to keep the issue of a peace treaty and unification on the table and this, in turn, was an additional prerequisite for preventing the second German state (i.e., the GDR) from gaining international recognition. It was Adenauer’s firm conviction that the Federal Republic of Germany was and had to remain the only German state. Here, one can also see the roots of the doctrine developed by Walter Hallstein, Adenauer’s secretary of state. According to the so-called Hallstein Doctrine, the FRG would break off diplomatic relations with any state (aside from the Soviet Union) that recognized the GDR.

Source

I. Telegram by U.S. High Commissioner John McCloy to Secretary of State Dean Acheson in Response to the “Stalin Note” (March 12, 1952)

West German reaction to Soviet demarche appears thus far to be gratifyingly level-headed. We get this from conversations with officials and from scanning this morning’s press. Separate telegram on press reactions is being sent.

Fortunately for us, most Germans have few illusions about Russia and Bolshevism. Most Germans who learned of Soviet proposals therefore approached them with skepticism. Editors have quickly pointed out defects in Soviet note from German point of view, particularly territorial limitations. Soviet terms were in general so overdrawn as to be implausible.

Notwithstanding this, we must recognize that issue to which Kremlin directed this propaganda blast – German unity – is one regarding which German people are sensitively responsive. That no (repeat no) dramatic response has thus far been elicited is due not to error in Soviet appeal to unity issue but to ingrained German suspicion of moves originating from the East.

Dangers inherent in Soviet move appear to us as follows:

1. Many Germans feeling strongly on unity issue will, despite conscious skepticism, wishfully hope that Kremlin proposal might at least be given a try. Natural tendency of Germans to look back over their shoulders at unity as a first priority may be fortified and there develop an increased inclination to drag their feet as we seek them to advance toward integration with West. Because these sentiments are at once so deep-rooted and so amorphous, we cannot be sure that initial sane reaction which we now observe to Kremlin demarche will remain steady.
2. Soviet terms for peace treaty obviously increase Federal Republic’s bargaining power in contractual negotiations while paradoxically emphasizing provisional character of Federal Republic thereby

weakening government's position.

3. If our reaction to Soviet note appears to be negative and foreclose possibility of German unity, Kremlin proposals will come to exercise an appeal which they do not now possess and task of persuading West Germans to go along with integration will be critically impeded.

We offer following suggestions for consideration by Department in its preparation of reply to Soviet Government.

1. We should indicate that we are gratified to note that Soviet Government has come to agree with us regarding importance of taking as a first step toward peace settlement creation of an All-German Government through democratic process. This obviously means All-German elections.

2. We have participated in creating of a UN commission to examine simultaneously in Federal republic and Soviet Zone possibility of holding such elections and to report findings to the UN.

3. We have forwarded to Soviet Government a Federal Republic draft law for holding such elections.

4. We await indication from Soviet Government that it will support these moves and hope that answer will be in affirmative.

5. Being serious in our desire to establish German unity as the indispensable first step toward peace, being interested in practical progress toward this goal and seeing no useful end being served by encouraging Soviet exercises in sophistry such as have been witnessed at the Palais Rose and through Austrian peace treaty negotiations, we do not propose to engage now in a discussion of the inadequacies of Soviet proposals for a German peace treaty.

To give reply positive tone first two points should be heavily emphasized and fifth played down.

Finally, we would recommend against officially going into any details regarding peace treaty terms proposed by Soviet Government. However, we do not feel that this should preclude active background guidance to press and radio.

We consider reply to Soviet note should be issued as soon as possible to avoid appearance to Germans of lack of allied resolutions.

II. Telegram by U.S. High Commissioner John McCloy to Secretary of State Dean Acheson on German reactions to the "Stalin Note" (March 29, 1952)

I. Not (repeat not) without good reason Germans are strongly inclined to view Soviet note of March 10 as addressed to them rather than to the Allies. They therefore tend to examine it as a serious offer of unity rather than as a propaganda move.

It is particularly difficult to judge German public opinion as soon after exchange of notes but we tend to believe that Germans' experiences of Russia as occupiers, prisoners of war and occupied make them skeptical of any Soviet offer and that are therefore not (repeat not) as yet greatly impressed by it. This negative reaction is, however, not (repeat not) static and may be reversed by the politicians particularly if West Powers appear to oppose unification.

Among those politicians who have carefully studied implications of note and our reply there are basically two schools of thought. Adenauer whose entire political creed is based on Western integration considers note chiefly an effort to disrupt his policy. Some of his advisors intimately familiar with Russia hold to view that Kremlin is in dead earnest in its intention not (repeat not) only of disrupting integration but of reorienting Germany to the East with initial status perhaps more like Finland or even Sweden than

Czechoslovakia but eventually as a junior partner in Soviet drive for world domination. They see a parallel between situation today and in 1939 when Westerners were futilely negotiating with Russians to prevent a German-Russia alliance which was so rudely shattered by Stalin's dramatic offer to Hitler resulting in Molotov Ribbentrop Act. Aware of challenge of such an offer Adenauer firmly believes it is up to Germany to prove her loyalty to West by rejecting it flatly and expediting conclusion of Defence Treaty and contractuals.

Adenauer however is constrained by fact that flat rejection gives appearance of forsaking Germany's own national interests in interests of Western Europe or as one Cabinet member put it of being more American than the Americans.

Coalition elements less wedded to European integration as an end in itself, more sensitive to charges of Quislingism [i.e. treason and collaboration] and more susceptible to nationalist slogans oppose flat rejection and urge further exploration of Soviet offer before final commitment to West. This group recommends a slowing down rather than speeding up of current negotiations. Thus far it is not (repeat not) very strong comprising chiefly a few soft-headed nationalists like Bleucher, and some left-wing CDU including Kaiser *and* Brentano. However, as connection between integration and unification be, is clearer especially after Allied notes stressed connection and as time for ratification draws closer, we can envisage strengthening of this school and growing reluctance to take final step that might be construed by public as slamming door on unification unless in meantime it is made absolutely clear to Germans that Soviet offer of unification is unacceptable to them. With Soviet offer opening apparently new vista, however bogus, some deputies may also be tempted to be more critical in their scrutiny of the terms of integration as contained in the contractual agreement.

Basically the SPD is through the long experience less sensitive to Soviet blandishments than possibly less experienced elements in coalition. However, because of its stubborn policy of opposition to Adenauer and especially to his policy of integration it may very well be tempted to side with the temporizers in coalition. Here[to]fore it has been possible to maintain at least semblance of unity between opposition and Government on East-West problems, but with evidence of difference of opinion within coalition itself it may prove difficult to hold SPD in line on this major issue.

II. German reactions to specific points of Soviet proposal are difficult to define but some general observation may be pertinent.

(A) Oder-Neisse Line is, of course, *least palatable of Soviet proposals*. Initially Germans were inclined to view that no (repeat no) German Government could accept settlement which did not (repeat not) involve return of east provinces. However, some Germans are now (repeat now) veering to view that they should take what they can get today and wait for rest till a more favorable opportunity arises.

(B) National Army. To many Germans, Soviet offer of national army has attraction of forbidden fruit as Allies had only offered participation in strange new concept of European Defence Force. In view of widespread fear of a return of the old militarism, this may appear irrational but there is no (repeat no) doubt that in many quarters Soviet offer has had a real appeal based on nationalism and the traditions and emotions connected with a German national army.

(C) Freedom of alliances. [Helene] Wessel's and Heinemann's neutrality doctrines have attracted far more attention than support in Germany. Nevertheless, if unification on acceptable terms appeared genuinely purchasable at price of provisional neutralization, many Germans might be tempted to consider deal in belief that once reunited Germany would be strong enough to regain her freedom to choose her allies.

(D) Freedom of trade. This Soviet proposal would seem to be particularly attractive to German industry.

As yet we have no (repeat no) concrete evidence of the Ruhr's reaction to Soviet note or our reply. However there are just enough straws in wind indicating Adenauer's industrial supporters are urging him to go slow on the contractual negotiations, to prompt us to investigate this interesting phase more carefully. We believe for example that Bluecher's adherence to the Kaiser school may be prompted by Dusseldorf's covetousness of Eastern markets particularly in event of business recession.

III. Thus far practical political result of exchange of notes has been a tendency in some circles to take another look at Western integration, particularly its possible incompatibility with unification, and there is a small but growing group who are urging Adenauer to go slow. Vigorously opposing them, Adenauer remains insistent on a speedy conclusion of agreements. Thus far he has behind him a majority of the cabinet and the tacit support of the majority of the coalition and probably also a large proportion of the electorate.

Nevertheless we cannot (repeat not) afford to disregard potentialities of those who would delay agreements pending clarification of Soviet intentions, particularly if there is evidence of a similar trend in either France or UK. They have cheap but powerful nationalistic slogans and can make popular charge that Adenauer is dividing Germany's loyalties between her eastern provinces and the West. Furthermore they have in the Saar issue an instrument of considerable tactical force to bring pressure on Adenauer to go slowly by demanding that the Saar problem be solved before any further commitments are made to West.

III. Telegram by U.S. High Commander John McCloy to Secretary of State Dean Acheson about a Conversation with Chancellor Konrad Adenauer on the "Stalin Note" (May 3, 1952)

Chancellor told me today that after serious consideration yesterday and "Through half the night," he had definitely concluded US proposal for meeting in Berlin (paragraph 9 Department's telegram 2850) would be a mistake at this time. If meeting is now (repeat now) suggested, Chancellor doubts that Cabinet would authorize him to sign contractual agreements until meeting had demonstrated whether Soviets sincere in their offer of free elections. He would expect opposition to insist that meetings take place before signature, but now (repeat now) fears even members of Government would take same line. He also believes it would be unwise to limit any quadripartite meeting to discussion of free election issue as Soviets might be prepared to make sufficient concessions to justify lengthy negotiations. During course of these, public attention would be concentrated on the concession and tend to overlook other objectionable phases of Soviet proposal. In these circumstances it would be impossible to conclude defence negotiations.

His view of the tactics to pursue are as follows:

(1) HICOMers [High Commissioners] should immediately write [W.I.] Chuikov asking for answer to their earlier communications on free elections which remain unanswered.

(2) Allied reply to Soviet note should pose series questions such as "what rights do Soviets contemplate new government would possess?" and "what rights would new government have in respect of Schuman Plan, EDC, etc.?" Allied note should also include general statement of Allied objectives and reasons for them to be contrasted with Soviet proposal for German National Army.

Chancellor believes (1) above would be very good way to stress Allied interest in free elections and in Bundestag conditions for them. If Chuikov's answer should come in before dispatch of Allied reply to Soviet note, it could be dealt with in that reply and if not (repeat not) as seems more likely, failure to answer could be referred to. Adenauer believes this would be sufficient to satisfy German public opinion and would avoid heavy risks of delaying signature of agreements which is now (repeat now) entailed in

proposal for early meeting.

My own view is that his suggestion of a series of questions would appear too much like fencing and thus lose public support. Can see no (repeat no) harm in HICOM prodding Chuikov but I do not (repeat not) believe it would carry much weight with German public opinion.

As radio reports from Paris today disclosed existence of US proposal, I felt free to mention it to [Ernst] Reuter who after weighing disadvantages and possible benefits said that on balance he would favor meeting but full exploration of the hazards of such action was not (repeat not) made with him.

In telephone conversation with London this afternoon, we understand US proposal has been modified in tripartite discussions and substitute is being offered on which we will comment as soon as received.

Source: Telegram from John McCloy to Dean Acheson (March 12, 1952), Telegram from John McCloy to Dean Acheson (March 29, 1952), and Telegram from John McCloy to Dean Acheson (May 3, 1952); reprinted in Rolf Steininger, *The German Question. The Stalin Note of 1952 and the Problem of Reunification*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990, pp. 125–27, 151–55, and 157–58.

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