

The Soviet Government's Explanation of its Berlin Policy (December 24, 1962)

Abstract

In a letter to Konrad Adenauer, Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev justifies the Berlin Wall, describing it as a defense against subversive Western activities. He criticizes West German efforts to resist communist infiltration and demands the conclusion of a peace treaty that would make West Berlin a “free city” without NATO protection.

Source

[...]

Recently, many new, meticulously verified facts and documents about unheard-of crimes orchestrated in West Berlin over the course of more than a decade have been made public and have thus occasioned warnings, protests, and objections.

Not long ago, a documentary book on this subject appeared; you probably already own it (if you wish, a copy of this book will be sent to you). As a rule, the occupation authorities of the Three Powers and the German authorities in West Berlin have remained silent about the aforementioned objections because the facts cannot be refuted. Evidently, they do not even wish to condemn these facts indirectly, since their policy was conceived of, so to speak, at the state level by means of these sorts of crimes, and they have no intention of distancing themselves from this policy. On the contrary: the agencies of the German Federal Republic presented this policy openly and shamelessly as well-thought-out and useful. Now, however, they want to look elsewhere for those responsible for the tense atmosphere that has developed.

Espionage and diversionary acts of various sorts, the smuggling of money and property out of the country [*Devisenschlebung*] and diverse corruption (both on an unprecedented scale), and the recent provocations on West Berlin's border to the GDR—West Berlin has tried just about everything possible to undermine the socialist order of the GDR and of other countries, to erode the edifice of peace.

As is known, the German Federal Republic has absolutely no right to West Berlin. Federal agencies, however, have totally flooded this city with official and unofficial institutions, with civil servants of all ranks and shades. They recruit West Berlin youths for the Federal Armed Forces [Bundeswehr] and want to adapt the city's economy to the military demands of the German Federal Republic. The government of the Federal Republic initiated a shameful trial [*Schandprozeß*] there against the Association of Victims of the Nazi Regime [Vereinigung der Verfolgten des Naziregimes], a trial against individuals who embodied the honor and the conscience of the German people in the years of struggle against the Hitler regime and who openly stand up for their antifascist attitudes today. This fact alone speaks volumes about the character of the entire series of events.

Day after day, your ministers, party functionaries, parliamentarians, and all sorts of visitors, whose numbers are legion, foment angry and dangerous agitation in West Berlin against peace and against the security of the neighboring socialist countries. After visits by these “guests,” new provocations occur in West Berlin, as do gang raids at the GDR border and other such things.

You, Mr. Chancellor, also travel there not infrequently. And every time you stay in the “frontline city” an

odious trace remains. Why? As one sees, you are not concerned with the interests of the population of West Berlin; rather, you are interested in using this city for hostile activities against the Soviet Union, the GDR, and other socialist countries.

The authorities of the German Federal Republic explain that an attack on the lives of border guards who are protecting the German Democratic Republic is not a crime; and they offer the murderers asylum. The provocateur Müller, who murdered GDR border guard Reinhold Huhn, has virtually been made into a hero. Why do you remain silent, Mr. Chancellor, when the lives of young Germans, border guards of the GDR, are extinguished by shots coming from West Berlin?

The facts show that the government of the Federal Republic wants Germans to become accustomed little by little to the possibility of a fratricidal war by Germans against Germans. In a speech delivered at the graduation ceremony for officers of the Military Academy of the Bundeswehr, Federal President [Heinrich] Lübke said that one day Bundeswehr soldiers might find themselves in a situation in which they will have to fight against their own compatriots. And then he goes on about the so-called communication problems between Germans in East and West.

What needs to be done to radically improve the situation and put an end to dangerous incidents on the border between West Berlin and the GDR, and also on the border between the German Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic?

The only option, Mr. Chancellor, is to sign a German peace treaty and to normalize the situation in West Berlin. "Normalize," mind you. What does that mean? It means eliminating the antiquated occupation regime, which in fact disguises a NATO base there; it means granting West Berlin the status of a free city; it means offering West Berlin effective international guarantees for that which you and your allies designate as absolute freedom: the right of the people of West Berlin to determine their own lifestyle and social order and to maintain unhindered connections with the outside world; and [it means] the guarantee of non-intervention in their internal affairs, regardless of which side it is coming from. It also means abandoning the subversive activities that are coming out of this city and being directed against the socialist states.

If necessary, troops could remain stationed in West Berlin for a certain period of time. What remains controversial is mainly the question: in what capacity and under which flag would these troops operate and how long would they remain there? The Soviet government recommends that the troops in West Berlin should not represent the NATO countries, that the NATO flag in West Berlin should be replaced by the flag of the United Nations, and that the UN should assume certain international obligations and functions there. Leaving the present abnormal situation in West Berlin as it is would be tantamount to deliberately resigning oneself to serious international complications.

If you really are genuinely concerned [with ensuring] that members of separated German families are able to have contact with their relatives, then I believe that the German Democratic Republic has made reasonable suggestions in this regard. But these were rejected by the authorities in West Berlin, whereby your personal influence was of more than minor importance. Therefore, you, too, share the responsibility for what has happened. Thus it is those who have adopted such an imprudent stance with respect to normalizing the situation in Europe and concluding a peace treaty with the two German states who have to answer for the sacrifice that you now mourn.

[...]

Every time the slightest glimmer of rapprochement in the positions of the two sides becomes perceptible, the government of the Federal Republic screams about "capitulation" and virtual "treason" by the Western powers, and accepts the most desperate of conjectures in order to block agreements and

tie the great powers' differences into an irresolvable knot.

You want to push your NATO allies to the limit. This is about the reputation of the United States throughout the whole free world; you recently wrote in the American journal *Foreign Affairs* that the United States gave its word and the whole world knows that it will keep its word.

Frankly speaking, I simply do not understand your policies. You have great responsibility for the affairs of the state; you can look back on grand life experiences and political expertise. You have already seen Germany unleash two World Wars. Are you looking for a pretext to unleash a third one? You are actually pleased that the Western powers are meeting their obligations. What obligations? Do you consider it the Western powers' obligation to unleash a world war? Is that their obligation? Can you even imagine what a thermonuclear war would mean, especially for the German Federal Republic?

I am thinking about the story of a child who got hold of a box of matches for the first time in his life, lit the matches, set a haystack on fire, and naively enjoyed it. But then the fire spread to the whole barn; the child himself burned to death, and a fire broke out in the village. Everyone is familiar with this story; therefore, mothers, fathers, and all adults make sure that as long as a child is growing up he has no access to matches, and they hide anything flammable from him. This leads to the following conclusion: One should not play with fire; one should foresee the possible outcomes of one's actions (and for politicians it is wise to look decades ahead).

[...]

Source: Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's Response (December 24, 1962) to German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer's Letter of August 28, 1962, on the German Problem and the Berlin Problem, *Europa-Archiv*, Series 2/1963, pp. D 33–D 37.

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