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**KHRUSHCHEV AND THE BERLIN
CRISIS (1958-1962)**

VLADISLAV M. ZUBOK

Working Paper No. 6

Washington, D.C.

May 1993

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Nikita S. Khrushchev is often remembered as a bold reformer who dismantled Stalin's legacy of terror and rejected the thesis of the inevitability of world war, an assumption that had long served a doctrinal basis of Soviet foreign policy. Khrushchev's diplomacy also helped tear down the myth of the hostile "encirclement" of the Soviet Union that, under Stalin, became a self-fulfilling prophecy. But these positive developments (that eventually led to Gorbachev's "new political thinking") were interspersed by reckless brinkmanship and ultimatums which culminated in the Berlin Crisis (1958-1962).

Even a cursory glance at the historiography of this Crisis leaves many questions about the Soviet side. Western writers usually viewed Khrushchev's motives as offensive and aggressive. Their conclusions were influenced by the obvious geopolitical fact that Khrushchev *could* use the vulnerability of West Berlin as a "lever" to pressure NATO, the United States and West Germany into concessions. But why did he decide to press this lever in 1958-1961 and to what ends? This question produced different hypotheses. Some authors (A. Ulam, J. Schick, M. Trachtenberg) believe the Soviet leadership primarily sought to block the nuclearization of West Germany.¹ Others (R. Slusser, I. Deutscher, C. Linden, W. Rostow, in part also Ulam) tend to believe that Khrushchev provoked the Crisis in order to restore his authority at home--an authority buffeted by setbacks in Soviet agricultural policies, in its missile build-up, and in its standing in the communist bloc resulting from Albania's defiance and the growing split with Communist China.² Researchers writing from European perspectives (M. Tatu, N. Gelb, H. Catudal) have contended that Khrushchev unleashed the Crisis in response to pressures from the "hawks" in the Kremlin and from the GDR leader Walter Ulbricht.³ In recent studies historians (M. Beschloss, P. Wyden, R. Garthoff) and political scientists (H. Adomeit) suggested that Soviet motives were largely defensive, but that their actions were shaped by a combination of perceived threats, including West German nuclearization and the possible collapse of the East German regime, and temptations, mostly linked to a perceived shift of the "correlation of forces" in favor of the USSR.⁴ One excellent account (M. Bundy) implies that Khrushchev was emboldened by changes

¹ Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence: The History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1967* (New York: Prager, 1968); Jack Schick, *The Berlin Crisis: 1958-1962* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971); Marc Trachtenberg, "The Berlin Crisis," in *History and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 169-234.

² Robert Slusser, *The Berlin Crisis of 1961: Soviet-American Relations and the Struggle for Power in the Kremlin, June-November 1961* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973); Isaac Deutscher, *Russia, China and the West, 1953-1966* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); Carl Linden, *Khrushchev and the Soviet Leadership* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966).

³ Michael Tatu, *Power in the Kremlin: From Khrushchev to Kosygin* (New York: Viking Press, 1971); Norman Gelb, *The Berlin Wall* (London: Michael Joseph, 1986); Honore M. Catudal, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis. A Case Study in U.S. Decision Making* (Berlin; Berlin Verlag, 1980).

⁴ Michael Beschloss, *The Crisis Years, Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: HarperCollins, 1991); Peter Wyden, *Wall: The Inside Story of Divided Berlin* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989); Raymond Garthoff, "Berlin 1961: the record corrected," *Foreign Policy*, 84 (Fall 1991), 142-56; Hannes Adomeit, *Soviet*

in the nuclear balance in favor of Moscow, and that the Berlin Crisis "was a Soviet exercise in atomic diplomacy."⁵ There is even a viewpoint (E.Barker) that Khrushchev did not have any designs or strategy, but was carried away by the dynamics of Cold War confrontation.⁶

In Soviet official publications and historiography the Berlin Crisis was usually depicted as Western negative reaction to reasonable "defensive" measures of the communist bloc aimed at stabilizing the GDR and blocking "subversive activities" originating in West Berlin. It was implied that those "defensive" measures were provoked by increasing challenges from West Germany, military as well as economic.⁷ As far as we know, Khrushchev was never criticized by his successors for his handling of the Berlin Crisis or its results.

What inspired Khrushchev to unleash this crisis and why did he persist, against fierce Western resistance, in his demands about a German peace settlement and West Berlin? And why did he stop half-way to his initial goal, a separate treaty with the GDR, and instead decide to build the Wall? What were the main driving forces and constraints behind Khrushchev's actions during the crisis? Why eventually did Khrushchev decide to end brinkmanship and the Crisis itself?

The new documents from the Soviet archives of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, combined with the old base of our knowledge, give a new impetus to the search of answers.⁸

Khrushchev, Soviet policy on Germany and the beginning of the crisis

When the crisis erupted in October 1958 Khrushchev was an unchallenged authoritarian leader who stood behind all major decisions in Soviet foreign policy. In this realm, his special

Risk-Taking and Crisis Behavior. A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis (Boston: George Allen and Unwin, 1982), 306-307.

⁵ McGeorge Bundy, *Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years* (New York: Random House, 1988), 359, 364.

⁶ Elizabeth Barker, "The Berlin crisis: 1958-1962," *International Affairs* (London), January 1963.

⁷ N.N. Inozemtsev (ed.), *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniia posle vtoroi mirovoi voiny. Bol. III, 1956-1964.* (Moscow: Politizdat, IMEMO, 1965), 210; B.N. Ponomarev, A.A. Gromyko and V.M. Khvostov, *Istoriia vneshnei politiki SSSR, 1917-1970*, Vol. II, 1945-1970, (Moscow: Nauka, 1971), 332; Viktor Vysotsky, *Zapadny Berlin i ego mesto v sisteme sovremennykh mexhdunarodnykh otnoshenii* (Moscow: Mysl, 1971); A.S. Grossman, "Granitsa mira," *Voprosy istorii* 10 (1969).

⁸ Much of this paper is based on the research done jointly with Zoya Vodopyanova, Ph.D., an archivist at the Storage Center for Contemporary Documentation (SCCD or, in Russian, TsKhSD) in Moscow. See: Zoya Vodopyanova and Vladislav Zubok, "The Berlin Crisis, 1958-1962: New Evidence from Soviet Archives," a paper presented at the Conference on New Evidence on Cold War History, Moscow, 12-15 January 1993. The author conducted additional research during this conference in SCCD. Other sources mainly came from the Archive of Foreign Policy of Russian Federation (AVP RF), particularly its "funds" of "referentura po Germanii" and of the Committee of Information. Much material, however, still is closed in the Presidential (Kremlin) archives, which reportedly contain any transcripts of Khrushchev's conversations, minutes of the Politburo, and intelligence reports from "special dossiers." Without an access to those materials no research on Khrushchev's role in the Berlin crisis can be considered definitive.

attention was drawn to several countries and issues that touched on Soviet vital interests and his own political authority. Concluding a German peace settlement was a "number one" priority; three others were achieving a detente with the United States, preserving and strengthening the alliance with the People's Republic of China, and supporting revolutionary movements of "national liberation" around the globe.

Khrushchev's *Deutschlandpolitik* was, naturally, based on very different premises than the German policy of the West. Unlike the West, which refused to recognize the GDR, Khrushchev had to deal with two German states, Ulbricht's German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany. His German policy therefore had always been two-pronged: propping up the East German regime and containing the FRG.

Western analysis forecast three prospects for West Germany's future. It might go nationalist or neutralist and become a loose cannon on European boat. It might return to a "historic" alliance with Russia, achieved after the First World War in Rappalo. Finally and preferably, West Germany might remain firmly anchored in NATO, a threat to no one and a defensive bulwark against any Soviet aggressiveness. Analysts in the Kremlin denied the plausibility of the third scenario, hoped for the second and feared the first. Hopes to de-couple West Germany from NATO led to Khrushchev's meeting with Konrad Adenauer in September 1955 in Moscow. But after that, fears prevailed. The early signs of "economic miracle" in the FRG produced a panicky conclusion: now Bonn is getting a firm ground for a more independent foreign policy with regard to the United States. In fact, the FRG "was becoming the major American partner" with a dreaded prospective opportunity--"activation of the course towards the German reunification on the bourgeois basis."⁹ In other words, the FRG could swallow the GDR.

Fears of nuclearization of the West German Bundeswehr were part of this general concern. In instructions to a Soviet ambassador in Bonn on 17 December 1955, the Presidium (Politburo) listed as the number one priority the monitoring of West German rearmament; a secondary task was to explore big business's attitudes towards a trade agreement with the USSR. For some time the Soviet leadership seemed to harbor hopes for the normalization of Soviet-West German relations, with an eye to promote West German independence from the United States and to undermine Adenauer's staunchly pro-West line.¹⁰ However, in the spring of 1957 the Soviets changed their minds. Adenauer and his state-secretary for foreign affairs, Heinrich von Brentano, told Soviet Ambassador A.A. Smirnov that they were on the verge of adopting a program of

⁹ *On political consequences of strengthening of the economy of the FRG, 28 December 1956* - A report of the Committee of Information (KI) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR to the Central Committee of the CPSU, AVP RF, Fond. 595, Opis. 6, Papka 789, Delo. 78, Listi (hereafter abbreviated as "11." or, in singular, "1.") 558, 559.

¹⁰ TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 64, Delo 578, 11. 10, 12, 15.

nuclear armament. Khrushchev replied with a harsh diplomatic note and cut off a confidential channel to Adenauer.¹¹ During the summer of 1958 the apprehension over the Bundeswehr's nuclear rearmament subsided somewhat, after the new president of France, Charles De Gaulle, cancelled a joint French-West German nuclear project. But it did not disappear.

Adenauer's public appeals for German reunification on Western terms evoked serious concern in Moscow. The Kremlin was particularly galled by Adenauer's insistence on the return of old German lands annexed after the Second World War by the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia. This "revanchism" in the FRG, in combination with rising economic potential and unflagging attempts at rearmament, could not be ignored by the Soviets, who viewed it as a threat to geopolitical stability and to their control in Eastern Europe. Valentin Falin, who later held the positions of ambassador in Bonn and head of the International Department of the Party's Central Committee, summed up prevalent fears in November 1956 in a memo to the Presidium (Politburo): "In case of a settlement of disputed issues between the FRG and Poland, the Polish government would no longer be interested in hosting Soviet troops on Polish territory." In the next diplomatic move Western powers could pick up the old Soviet proposal to withdraw all foreign troops from the German territory. The Soviet Union then would have to pull her troops back "not to the Oder-Neusse line, but within her state borders." Another consequence of the Falin's "worst case scenario" would be the reorientation of the Polish economy to West Germany's powerful economy. Finally Poland would become "a kind of obstacle" for the military and economic communications between the USSR and the GDR, and the latter would find itself isolated and vulnerable "to subversive activities and sabotage from within."¹²

The menacing rise of West Germany coincided with an aggravation of the economic situation in the GDR. The disparity in living standards between two German states produced an ever growing flight of skilled workers and professionals from the GDR to the FRG through the open border in Berlin. Soviet economic planners and managers knew that without Soviet subsidies and cheap resources, living standards in the GDR would drastically decline. They also suspected that the FRG had more economic leverage over the GDR than was generally recognized. There was, in other words, a danger of "conquest without war" by means of economic strangulation.

Had the Soviets failed to guarantee the security of the GDR and other East European satellites, they worried that Poland and even Czechoslovakia might deal with Bonn directly.

¹¹ Ibid, 11. 17-18.

¹² *Calculations and plans of the ruling circles of the FRG on the German problem with regard to the events in Poland and Hungary, 29 November 1956*, A report of KI, AVP RF, fond 595, Opis 6, Box 789, Vol. 78, 1. 437.

There were signals that West German diplomacy was prepared to offer those countries various attractive "deals" if they distanced themselves from the Soviet Union.¹³

By the fall of 1958, the Soviets came to believe that the FRG was planning some drastic actions--economic, but perhaps also military--against the Eastern bloc, and first of all against the GDR.¹⁴ The sources of this intelligence are unclear. The Soviet ambassador in Bonn, Smirnov, informed Ulbricht on 5 October 1958 that "since April ... the situation in West Germany seriously deteriorated and took an unwelcome direction ... The formation of Bundeswehr goes on, atomic armament is now legalized" ... "Our joint task," he stressed, "is to keep putting a braking influence on the formation of the Bundeswehr." Given good coordination between the two countries, this development "could be delayed by two to three years, which would be a serious gain for our mutual cause." Smirnov offered the following formula for coordinated actions: "to retaliate against the enemy's offensive by a counteroffensive on the part of the GDR."¹⁵

These developments alone were enough to require some sort of action on the part of Khrushchev. At some point that summer the Soviet leadership decided to react to the growing geopolitical challenge, if not a specific threat from West Germany, by reviving its own campaign for a "peace settlement" in the area. At the order of the Central Committee, Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet foreign minister, worked out a detailed plan for this campaign. So far the primary initiative had to come from the GDR, not the Soviet Union. In September the GDR sent diplomatic notes to Western powers and the FRG suggesting negotiations. That still did not mean a crisis.

It was Khrushchev's perceptions and commitments that gave the whole situation a much more dramatic twist.

His first commitment was to the GDR and Walter Ulbricht, first secretary of the Socialist Unity Party (SED). In 1953 Khrushchev attacked Beria and Malenkov for "betraying socialism" in East Germany and in so doing effectively hooked his political fortunes with those of Ulbricht. In the second half of the 1950s Ulbricht was beyond any criticism from the Soviets. Ulbricht, of course, could not repeat the exploits of Kim Il Sung, who won independent stature through Korea's unique geopolitical location and became (in Soviet eyes) a "hero of war or national liberation." Ulbricht's amazing transformation from Moscow's stooge to the tail who wagged the dog was largely a result of the use of two "strings." First were his recurrent attempts to proceed with the "construction of socialism" in East Germany, to collectivize its agriculture, and to strangulate the private sector in trade and industry. That wrought havoc on the GDR's economy

¹³ *From the diary of attache V.V. Karyagin, Soviet embassy in the GDR, 17 July 1957, TsKhSD, fond 5, opis 49, delo 17, 11. 46-47.*

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 1. 233.

¹⁵ *M. Pervukhin. Memorandum of conversation with Ulbricht, 5 October 1958 (A. Smirnov took part in the conversation), Ibid, Delo 82, 11. 213-214, 216.*

and caused the flight of its population to the West.¹⁶ Ulbricht's actions violated the covenant of 1953 that decried "forced" methods of Sovietization in the GDR. But they evoked Khrushchev's sympathies: the Soviet leader felt the Ulbricht was doing what any good communist was supposed to do.

Ulbricht also exploited Khrushchev's fear that he might "lose" the GDR. Khrushchev felt special affinity for the first German state of "workers and peasants" because he believed it was bought at the price of millions of Soviet lives during the war with the Nazis. That emotional affinity (comparable to the subsequent bond with Cuba) explains why Ulbricht could repeatedly dupe Khrushchev and other Soviet officials by his window-dressing campaigns designed "to develop friendship between the Soviet Union and the German people of the GDR." "Cordial and sincere" meetings with auditoriums of hand-picked loyalists, including Social Democrats from West Berlin, "pleasantly surprised" and relieved the suspicious Soviet leader.¹⁷ The more they would be "exposed" to beneficial and salutary effect of socialist ideology and labor relations, Khrushchev calculated, the less would be the risk of war between the two nations in the future.

Several days after the suppression of the Budapest uprising in November 1956 Soviet troops in the GDR grappled with furious crowds of protesters. Khrushchev gave instruction to Army Group Commander-in-Chief Andrei Grechko to shoot if necessary.¹⁸ In the new atmosphere of widespread alarm among various groups of the Soviet elites one intelligence memo to Moscow praised Ulbricht for security-directed measures which, along with "presence of Soviet troops," became "a crucial factor of stability in the Republic."¹⁹

The second Khrushchev commitment that had a profound impact on his German policy in the fall of 1958 was to bolstering Sino-Soviet relations, which he believed were the "gem" of his personal diplomacy. Since the fall of 1957, however, the PRC leadership had begun to challenge Khrushchev's authority in the international arena.²⁰ In August 1958, immediately after

¹⁶ *On the situation in the bourgeois parties of the GDR, 27 March 1954*, A report of the KI, AVP RF, Fond 595, Opis 6, Papka. 769, Delo. 25, 1.273; *Politika SEPG po otnosheniyu k chastnomuy sektoru v promyshlennosky i trgovle GDR, 26 November 1956* [Policies of the SED regarding the private sector in industries and trade of the GDR], *Ibid*, Vol. 78, 11. 405-415.

¹⁷ Jerrold Schechter and Vyacheslav Luchkov (eds.), *Khrushchev Remembers. The Glasnost Tapes* (Boston: Little, Brown 1990), 161.

¹⁸ Victor Karyagin, "Berlin After the War," *International Affairs* 7 (1991), 88.

¹⁹ *On some issues of economy and domestic politics of the GDR, 28 December 1956*, A report of the KI, AVP SSSR, Fond 595, Opis 6, Papka 789, Delo 78 11. 532, 534.

²⁰ Former East German and Soviet officials confirmed this point in interviews with an American historian, see Hope Harrison, "Soviet and East German Policy during the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1961: New Archival Evidence from Moscow and East Berlin," paper presented to the Conference on New Evidence on Cold War History, Moscow, 12-15 January 1993), 23-24. A revised version of Harrison's paper is available from the Cold War International History Project: "Ulbricht and the Concrete "Rose": New Archival Evidence on the Dynamics of Soviet-East German Relations and the Berlin Crisis, 1958-1961, Cold War International History Project Working Paper No. 5 (May 1993).

Khrushchev's visit to Peking and without even notifying him, the leadership of the PRC began preparations for retaking several off-shore islands occupied by the Guomintang forces. The resulting crisis was like a bolt from the blue for the Soviet political and military leadership: suddenly they faced the prospect of war between its main ally and the United States.

Khrushchev's attention was riveted to the Far East: he pressed on all pedals to deter Mao. In September Gromyko visited Beijing and persuaded the Chinese to drop their plans to land on the off-shore islands. But as Khrushchev restrained the Chinese in the East, he had to show that he was decisive about restraining the United States and FRG in their campaign against the GDR.²¹

The parallels between the two areas of instability could not escape Khrushchev. In October 1958, Secretary of State John Foster Dulles (whom Khrushchev considered the real shaper of Eisenhower's foreign policy) visited Taiwan and drew clear parallels between U.S. commitment to the insignificant islands in the Yellow Sea and to another tiny island of democracy in the sea of totalitarianism: West Berlin. Soviet officials in particular cited Dulles's extracting of a promise by Nationalist Chinese leader Chiang KaiShek not to invade the mainland as evidence of a broader American strategy to freeze the Cold War status quo. "Having obtained 'non-use of force' in landing on the [mainland Chinese] continent," commented the Soviet embassy from Beijing, "Dulles believed he could take advantage of this development to persuade world public opinion that China also belongs to the category of divided states, like Korea, Vietnam and Germany."²²

Dulles's comparison was caught and magnified by Ulbricht. "By comparing West Berlin with China's off-shore islands," he told Mikhail Pervukhin, Moscow's ambassador to the GDR, "Dulles himself unmasked the essence of the 'psychological war,' directed from West Berlin."²³ He urged Khrushchev "to act from a position of strength." "The point is," the GDR ruler argued, "that as soon as the issue of the Chinese islands is removed from the front burner, the next will be Germany."²⁴ Khrushchev's impression must have been otherwise: if Americans under pressure resorted to the principle of "two Chinas," it could mean that, under similar pressure, they might recognize "two Germanys" as well.

Khrushchev's third commitment, reinforced by his recent internal leadership struggles, was to the principle of conducting "diplomacy from the position of strength." Oleg Troyanovsky,

²¹ For recent evidence on Soviet policy toward the offshore islands crisis, see two papers presented at the Conference on New Evidence on Cold War History, 12-15 January 1993, Moscow: Konstantin Pleshakov (Institute of the USA and Canada), "Khrushchev as Counter-Revolutionary: the Taiwan Straits Crisis of 1958 and the Sino-Soviet Schism," and I.N. Shevchuk (TsKhSD) and M. Yu. Prozmenshchikov (TsKhSD), "Soviet-Chinese Relations, 1953-1959 (On the Basis of Documents of the Storage Center for Contemporary Documentation)."

²² *Report of the Soviet Embassy in the PRC for 1958*, TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 49, Delo 134, 1. 167.

²³ *M. Pervukhin-Ulbricht conversation, 26 September 1958*, TsKhSD, Delo 76, 11, 23-24.

²⁴ *M. Pervukhin, the Soviet ambassador in the GDR. Memorandum of conversation with Ulbricht and Grotewohl, 2 October 1958*, TsKhSD, Delo 82, 11, 200-204.

interpreter to Molotov and Khrushchev, recalls that the abortive coup against Khrushchev in June 1957 strongly affected his subsequent foreign policy. As the United States did not respond to Khrushchev's approaches--"nothing came back from the American side"--and continued to support the FRG's rearmament, the "anti-party group," especially Molotov, claimed that Khrushchev's concessions and compromises had led nowhere. Before the coup Molotov ordered his aides to comb Lenin's writings for the phrase "Naivete in politics is worse than a crime." The protocols of the July Plenum confirm that Khrushchev's foreign policy, along with his agricultural policy, was under attack.²⁵ Troyanovsky, who became Khrushchev's aide in the summer of 1958, believes that this was on his boss's mind as he began to plot a showdown in Berlin.²⁶

When Walter Lippmann interviewed Khrushchev in Moscow on October 24, he was struck to find the Soviet leader in a cocoon of pre-1941 fears. The First Secretary compared Adenauer to Paul von Hindenburg, the president of Weimar Republic who elevated Hitler to power in 1933. The situation, he said, was similar to the eve of the Second World War, and the U.S. policy "was the same"--pushing Germany against the East. He bitterly complained that the United States encouraged West German remilitarization, warning that "Americans seem not to realize the dangers which their present politics may well bring them." At present, he said, there was no country in Europe as strong as West Germany. It had perhaps a stronger military-industrial potential than France, England and Spain together. Americans, he finished ominously, "may someday pay with her blood for having encouraged such people."²⁷

Two weeks later Khrushchev in two speeches presented the West with a choice: either the German peace treaty would be signed by all former Allies with occupation rights in Germany, or the Soviet Union would do it alone by reaching a separate treaty with the GDR.

The new documentation shows that Khrushchev's ultimatum was ninety percent improvisation. Not until a month after the speeches, on Christmas Eve of 1958, did Andrei Gromyko prepare two drafts of a German peace treaty. One was with the GDR alone. Another, with two German states, was designed to achieve a partial withdrawal of foreign troops from German territory, which "would be effectively tantamount to a collapse of NATO." Gromyko added matter-of-factly that "Western powers and the FRG obviously will not agree with our proposals." Betraying the design of Khrushchev, he concluded that "after the possibilities of

²⁵ The protocols are in the Kremlin (Presidential) archives, but were used for writing of a paper for the conference on New Evidence on Cold War History in Moscow, 12-15 January 1993. See Sergei Kiselev and Yuri Malov. "The Soviet leaders' foreign policy mentality (1953-1957)," 16, 19.

²⁶ Interview of the author with Troyanovsky, 9 March 1993, Washington, DC.

²⁷ Notes taken during Lippmann's interview with Khrushchev, 24 October 1958, Walter Lippmann papers, Yale University, Sterling Library, Series VII, Box 239, F. 27.

political struggle with the whole Germany will be sufficiently exhausted," the Soviets might conclude a separate treaty with Ulbricht and Otto Grotewohl, the GDR prime minister.²⁸

By unleashing the Berlin Crisis Khrushchev must have believed he was killing many birds with one stone. He was pressing hard on an "acorn" of the West to deter the United States in the Far East and to preempt *Drang Nach Osten* (drive toward the east) from West Germany. He also gave decisive support to Ulbricht's regime in the GDR. And all that was couched in the language of a peace settlement designed to sound irresistible to world public opinion.

From diplomacy of strength to the show of strength

Despite pessimism of his diplomats, Khrushchev believed that he would be able to work out some compromise with the Washington and Bonn over Germany. In February 1958, long before the Berlin crisis, Khrushchev ordered Gromyko to look into two ideas: an invitation to Vice-President Richard Nixon to come to the Soviet Union, and a U.S.-Soviet conference "at the very highest level."²⁹ Yuri Gvozdev, a KGB officer in Washington, asked his American contact, journalist John Currey: "What if Mr. Khrushchev were to come here to Washington, for some informal talks with Mr. Eisenhower? Would your government permit that?"³⁰

During 1959 he used the Berlin Crisis as a stepping stone of his personal diplomacy. He opened secret channels of communications to the White House and to Bonn's Chancellery. Soon after Khrushchev's first ultimatum on Berlin the aforementioned Gvozdev passed a note to Vice-President Nixon that assured: "Don't worry about Berlin. There is not going to be any war over Berlin." Barely a month after the "deadline" note Gvozdev informed the Americans that Khrushchev was "very interested" in a Nixon visit to the Soviet Union. He would "bid very high for it in terms of constructive proposals on Berlin."³¹

In January 1959 Deputy Prime Minister Anastas Mikoyan arrived in Washington and, during a conversation with Eisenhower, said that he was instructed by Khrushchev to propose to the president "to end the cold war." "It is necessary to make a start and while the first agreement might not be important, it is possible for it to snowball and lead to a great improvement." Mikoyan reassured his interlocutor that Khrushchev's ultimatum was not given with an aim to "undermine the prestige of the Western powers or to make them 'lose face.'" "We do not want to fight over Berlin," he continued, "and we hope you don't want to, either." He had instructions

²⁸ AVP RF, Fond 0742, Opis 3, Papka 21, Delo 33, 11. 16-19, 20.

²⁹ TsKhSD, Card index of incoming documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Central Committee, Nos. 4554 and 4556.

³⁰ Extracts from Report by Mr. John Currey of conversation held with him on 22 January 1958 by Mr. Yuri Gvosdev of the Soviet Embassy, DDEL, AWF, International Series, Box 46, fld. USSR 1958 (3) x.

³¹ Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 154.

from Khrushchev to propose U.S.-Soviet talks on Germany as a whole and to keep Adenauer out of these talks as a major opponent of the peace treaty. Perhaps Adenauer thought that "by delaying a peace treaty he might become stronger, exploit the differences between us and base his position upon force."³²

Khrushchev clearly expected that, with Dulles bedridden and dying from cancer, the U.S. president would be more flexible. But Mikoyan came back convinced that "the U.S. government still clings to its old position and expresses no wish to undertake any steps" toward a compromise.³³

An encounter with Nixon in Moscow in July ended in a verbal brawl, but it did not dismay Khrushchev, who planned to turn 1959 into a year of his personal diplomacy. He looked forward to "the magic of a meeting with the President," the U.S. ambassador Lewellyn Thompson cabled from Moscow. Chairman's envoy Alexei Kosygin approached the ambassador with a message: "There is no question which Khrushchev and the President cannot settle." Thompson even dared to pose a question: Would the summit lead to the end of the cold war? His conclusion was sober. "Given Khrushchev's character and that of other members of current regime here," it would be impossible to reach "a basic and fundamental solution" of problems clouding the relationship with the Soviet Union.³⁴

Finally Khrushchev's efforts were crowned with a great success: an invitation to the United States. Khrushchev came to Camp David in September 1959 in a mood to reach a deal. The Berlin deadline was postponed and, it was hinted, might be suspended altogether. Sino-Soviet relations caused him less concern in 1959. The offshore islands crisis in the Far East had subsided and the Chinese assured their Soviet "friends" that they would delay "liberation" of the islands by several decades. At the same time Khrushchev learned from his intelligence that Adenauer was isolated in NATO in his insistence that Eastern lands, now in Poland, should be returned to Germany.³⁵

He now felt he was in a strong position to offer an olive branch to the chancellor. In a letter to Adenauer sent on August 18, he had suggested reviving bilateral talks. If Adenauer abandoned irredentism, Khrushchev wrote, "then only ideological contradictions stand between

³² V. Kuznetsov to M. Suslov, "The draft of confidential information for the leaders of a number of states about the main topics of discussion between Mikoyan and the statesmen of the United States," 21 January 1959, TsKhSD, fond 5, opis 30, delo 300, 11. 1-8; Memcon, Mikoyan's Call on the President, 17 January 17 1959, DDEL, AWF, International Series, Box 49.

³³ Kuznetsov to Suslov, *ibidem*.

³⁴ Telegram from Thompson to Herter, no. 223, National Archives, Record Group 59, F.661, Box. 2653, Fldr. 93/1-357.

³⁵ "Classified review of the relations between the USSR and the FRG in 1949-1970," prepared by the Historical-Diplomatic Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the USSR for the International Department of the Central Committee, May 1972, TSKhSD, fond 5, opis 64, delo 578, 1. 24.

us. But discrepancies in ideology, religion, as well as differences in taste will be always with us." The second condition of normalization was *de facto* acceptance of the GDR by the chancellor and his government. Khrushchev proposed that Bonn accept the idea of confederation of two German states with a "free city" of West Berlin, and he intimated that he preferred this scenario to a separate treaty with the GDR and a conference of great powers on German reunification. The latter would mean "throwing the question to a group of state where the capitalist states have three votes, and the socialist - one." Trying to put Adenauer in his shoes, he added: you would not be enthusiastic as well, if German's future were up for decision of another group of states, "for example Poland, Czechoslovakia, China and the Soviet Union."

Always blunt, Khrushchev confronted Adenauer with two alternatives. If the Chancellor said "yes" there would be benefits of trade, huge Eastern resources married to German technological genius, Khrushchev's return visit to Bonn and Adenauer's role in history books for his contribution "to the noble task of liquidation of the state of the 'Cold War.'" On the contrary, if the old man stuck to his old course, he would confront unsurmountable force in the East, run the risk of nuclear destruction of the whole of Germany, and, perhaps, would appear in the eyes of public opinion as a "war-happy," lonely, and despised figure. Khrushchev did not resist the temptation to pit Adenauer against Eisenhower. "We attribute great significance to forthcoming talks with the U.S. president," he wrote. Perhaps they would constitute "a breakthrough" in relations between the two superpowers. Bluntly hinting that the German question could be solved behind Adenauer's back, Khrushchev added tartly that he and Eisenhower "cannot dwell in our talks only on issues of corn and cucumber."³⁶

At Camp David in September, Khrushchev heard from Eisenhower what he wanted to hear. The President soothed his ego, saying he had a chance to become the greatest political figure in history because of his tremendous power over a monolithic communist bloc. In comparison, he, Eisenhower, had power as far as only the United States was concerned, and in sixteen months he would be just a private citizen.³⁷ This estimate of personal balance of power was clearly in favor of the Soviet.

Khrushchev wanted Eisenhower to start serious negotiations on the German question which would have meant indirect recognition of East Germany and the territorial acquisitions of Poland and Czechoslovakia. Privately he said that he needed ten years "to educate the GDR to vote in a right way in a free election."³⁸

³⁶ Letter of N.S. Khrushchev to Chancellor K. Adenauer, 18 August 1959, AVP RF, fond 0757, opis 4, papka 22, delo 9, 11. 22-34.

³⁷ President's Private Conversation with Khrushchev, 15 September 1959, JFKL, POF:CO:USSR, Box 126, Fldr.3.

³⁸ Eisenhower recalled these comments in a conversation with State Department official Livingston T. Merchant at the May 1960 Paris summit: Merchant handwritten notes dated 15 May 1960, Box 2, Merchant Papers, Mudd Library, Princeton University.

Again, as in his letter to Adenauer, Khrushchev seemed to act on a conviction that a compromise deal with Bonn and Washington on Germany was preferable to a separate treaty with the GDR. Unlike Ulbricht, who wanted to annex West Berlin outright, Khrushchev wanted to keep it a neutral territory. He needed it both as a geostrategic Achilles's heel of the Western security system and a Western Hong Kong, a trade link between the communist East and capitalist West Germany. He was prepared to negotiate with Americans, British and French over their presence in and access to West Berlin. But the status quo was unacceptable because it was tantamount to the disruptive presence of rich West Germany at the heart of the weak unstable GDR.

In Khrushchev's view the best results of the Camp David talks were special relations with Eisenhower and a promised trip of the U.S. president to the Soviet Union. The Soviet leader never believed he would achieve much at the multilateral summit in Paris in May 1960. However, he expected to be treated with respect no less than Stalin had been in 1945 at Yalta and Potsdam. In early 1960 this expectation suffered serious blows. At a press-conference of February 3 Eisenhower stunned Khrushchev with a phrase: "I have always been of the belief that we should not deny to our allies what the enemies"--here the President caught on himself--"what our potential enemy already has." It would be in the interests of the United States, he thought, to enact "more liberal" legislation about sharing nuclear secrets."³⁹

A flock of cables flew to Moscow from Soviet intelligence chiefs-of-stations and ambassadors, including ones in Berlin and Bonn. Soon Eisenhower received a letter from Khrushchev in which the Soviet leader wondered if the United States indeed had decided to arm their allies, including the Federal Republic of Germany, with nuclear weapons. The text of the missive was more revealing in its omissions rather than actual content. The chairman once again drew a parallel between China and Germany: if the U.S. would entrust nuclear arms to Adenauer, the Soviet Union "would in this case have all the reasons to share this weapon with friendly countries." We now know that this linkage was a bluff: Khrushchev by that time decided not to give nuclear weapons to the Chinese.⁴⁰

The second warning signal was the attitude of French President Charles de Gaulle. During the state visit of Khrushchev in Paris in March-April 1960 de Gaulle strongly supported the continued division of Germany and the inviolability of power-war Eastern borders, but with the same strength argued for a status quo in Berlin. "What's the hurry, Mr. Khrushchev? he asked. "Why do you want to sign this peace treaty right now? The time isn't ripe yet."⁴¹

³⁹ *The New York Times*, 4 February 1960, 12.

⁴⁰ Letter of Khrushchev to Eisenhower, 3 March 1960, DDEL, AWL, Box 49, file 2, p. 3; John W. Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1988), 69-72.

⁴¹ Strobe Talbott (ed.), *Khrushchev Remembers: The Last Testament* (Boston; Little, Brown, and Co., 1974), 440-42.

In spring of 1960 Khrushchev must have begun to perceive that he might, indeed, be outgunned and humiliated in Paris. To make matters worse, the KGB obtained through his agents some materials documenting Western preparations for the summit indicating that Eisenhower had nothing new to say on Germany and, together with two other Western leaders, British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan and de Gaulle, would support Adenauer's position.⁴²

When the U-2 was brought down on May Day, Khrushchev decided to scuttle the Paris Summit, but did not abandon hopes to reach out to Western leaders. Eisenhower was leaving his post in less than a year. Adenauer faced reelections in September. Their successors might be more flexible, especially after an appropriate show of strength on the part of the Soviet Union.

Despite all the harsh rhetoric after the U-2 incident, Khrushchev's steps were measured. He ignited confrontations in the Third World, but at the same time pulled his punches against West Berlin. The following dialogue between him and Walter Ulbricht in November 1960 revealed the reason for this restraint. Khrushchev reminded his East German guest that "after Paris, when we turned down a possibility of a summit, you agreed with us that under existing circumstances we should not have signed [a separate] peace treaty." Ulbricht agreed. "At that time," continued Khrushchev, "we were right, we took the right step, since otherwise it would have looked as if we had provoked the summit break-up in order to conclude a peace treaty. But we proved that we did not want it. We are looking for the optimal conditions for reaching a peace treaty." Khrushchev said that commentaries of Western mass-media and his conversations with Western politicians "demonstrate that such a policy brought us a huge success."⁴³

Khrushchev's show of force around the world happened as Sino-Soviet relations rapidly deteriorated. And it was not a mere coincidence. The U-2 debacle could not have come in a worse moment: many in Moscow still believed that the schism with Beijing was just a misunderstanding. Among the two priorities of Soviet foreign policy--detente with the West and the Sino-Soviet alliance--the latter in their eyes was much more important. By pursuing the rapprochement with the United States, they argued, one would lose a major ally without gaining anything in return. Khrushchev had these doubts himself.⁴⁴ Only the news from China gradually liberated him from them. The Soviet embassy in Beijing reported that the Chinese "used the aggravation of international situation after the failure of the Paris summit" to oppose "for the first time directly and openly" the foreign policy of the CPSU.⁴⁵

⁴² The KGB chief Alexander Shelepin cited these materials as one of the greatest achievements of Soviet foreign intelligence in his annual report to the Party Presidium, dated 14 February 1961, TsKhSD, Fond 4, Opis 12, Delo 74, 11. 144, 147.

⁴³ *Memorandum of conversation of Comrade Khrushchev and Comrade Ulbricht, 30 November 1960*, AVP RF, fond 0742, opis 6, papka 43, delo 4, 11. 8-9.

⁴⁴ Interview with O.A. Troyanovsky, 23 March 1993, Washington, DC.

⁴⁵ *Political Letter from the Soviet Embassy in the PRC for the second quarter of 1960*, TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 49, Delo 340, 1.54.

The GDR was another pain in Khrushchev's neck. After the Paris fiasco Ulbricht and his colleagues believed it was time to take revenge. A Soviet diplomat informed Moscow that "at least seventy percent" of SED activists were in a "fighting mood," prepared to storm West Berlin tomorrow. "It goes without saying ... the Soviet troops were to be in the vanguard."⁴⁶ The SED officials let the Soviets in on their plans of "purification" of West Berlin after the conclusion of a separate treaty.⁴⁷ Ulbricht openly criticized Khrushchev's policy in conversations with Smirnov. He complained that "the palaver about disarmament has weakened the revolutionary vigilance over here." He also hinted that Khrushchev exaggerated Adenauer's abhorrence of war. In his words, "the main concept of Adenauer [is that] a war is inevitable."⁴⁸

The East German ruler used salami tactics to test how far the Soviets were prepared to go along with him in ratcheting up the crisis. On October 17, Moscow received a cable from a Soviet diplomat that the East German "friends" were planning to close the sectoral border in Berlin. The Soviet observer recommended raising this issue "on the appropriate level" to prevent future surprises.⁴⁹

It was a real surprise, however, when late in October the GDR government asked Moscow for a massive aid to substitute for trade and economic relations with the FRG which they expected to be severed in the event of a peace treaty or a seizure of West Berlin. Khrushchev and his economic planners were struck by how much economy of East Germany had become dependant on the economy of the FRG.

To clarify the situation, Khrushchev met with Ulbricht on 30 November 1960. The Soviet leader came from another meeting, with a delegation from People's Republic of China, with a vision of imminent Sino-Soviet schism haunting his mind. First, he wanted to make sure that the U-2 incident did not mean a collapse of negotiations with the West. As noted previously, Khrushchev explained that he had eschewed moving rapidly after the breakup of the Paris conference to sign a peace treaty with East Germany in order to avoid accusations that he had engineered the summit's failure for precisely that purpose.⁵⁰ But, he now told Ulbricht, if the next administration in Washington refuses to sign an East-West treaty resolving the German question, "then we will sign a peace treaty with the GDR." He told Ulbricht that under no circumstances

⁴⁶ *First Secretary of the Embassy in the GDR (A. Avaldiey) on his conversation with O. Neumann, member of the SED Central Committee, June 9, 1960, TsKhSD, Opis 50, Delo 226, 1. 122.*

⁴⁷ *Yu. Kvitsinsky, conversation with P. Papist, 21 October 1960, TsKhSD, Opis 49, Delo 288, 1. 278.*

⁴⁸ *Conversations of Walter Ulbricht and A. Smirnov in the Soviet Embassy in the GDR, 15 July 1960, TsKhSD, Delo 288, 1. 239.*

⁴⁹ *A.P. Kazeinov, a first secretary, the Soviet embassy in the GDR, TsKhSD, 11. 275.*

⁵⁰ *Khrushchev-Ulbricht conversation record, 30 November 1960, AVP RF, fond 0742, opis 6, papka 43, delo 4,1. 8.*

would Soviet forces be moved into West Berlin. Rather "we will work out with you a tactic of gradually crowding out the Western powers from West Berlin, but without war."⁵¹

In the presence of Ulbricht Khrushchev was quite optimistic about the chances for a compromise with the West. He cited his recent conversations with the FRG ambassador in Moscow, Hans Kroll, who said that his government no longer insisted on "absorbing the GDR and changing the existing German borders" as a precondition of a peace settlement. Khrushchev also recalled conversations with "Douglas"--not further identified, possibly Supreme Court Justice William Douglas-- and Walter Lippmann during his visit in the United States. "They also support a peace treaty with Germany and the creation of a free city, of course on the basis of a united Berlin. But we rejected this proposal on Berlin."⁵² Being a hostage of his commitment to the GDR security and Ulbricht regime, Khrushchev desperately searched for an alternative to a unilateral actions.

The next point on the agenda was East Germany's demand for increased economic assistance. Although other Soviets present at the negotiations argued it was too much and too sudden, Khrushchev understood that the Soviet Union could not abandon the GDR in dire straits. He still hoped to win West Berlin over by means of trade and economic incentives. If the GDR economy collapsed, this plan would be doomed. At the same time Khrushchev wanted to use the promise of money as a leash on his unruly satellite. The gossip about Ulbricht's sympathetic attitude toward the Chinese may have reached his ears. So he chided the East German communists for "playing games" with their Soviet sponsors. "Don't thrust your hands into our pockets," he warned them. At the same time, of course, he played his own game by offering to sign a separate peace treaty with the GDR in 1961. As he suspected, Ulbricht, afraid of economic blockade of the GDR by the West, declined this "generous" offer. The ball in Ulbricht's court, Khrushchev was insistent. "If we don't sign a peace treaty in 1961," he went on, "then our prestige will have been dealt a blow and the position of the West, and West Germany in particular, will be strengthened." He said the West will not start a war over a peace treaty. Of course, he added, the Soviets "will have to put our rockets on military alert. But, luckily, our adversaries still haven't gone crazy. They still think and their nerves still aren't bad."⁵³

It was agreed between Khrushchev and Ulbricht that "the government of the GDR will not unilaterally take any steps toward liquidation of the remnants of the war"--that is, a separate peace treaty--since "that could aggravate the situation and cause damage to negotiations between the USSR and Western powers...This concerns, first and foremost, the regime of control over cross-sectoral movements in Berlin." The Soviet embassy in East Berlin, commenting on this meeting,

⁵¹ Ibidem, 11. 15-16.

⁵² Ibidem, 1. 9.

⁵³ Ibidem, 11. 10-11, 12.

remarked that the GDR policy "regarding West Berlin has to be more flexible in character and should contribute to our common line of increasing the influence of socialist countries on West Berlin."⁵⁴

Does this mean Khrushchev mostly bluffed on the separate treaty and expected to stabilize the GDR without violating Western rights in West Berlin? If so, the Soviet strategy was flawed from the very beginning: it was predicated on the success of economic development of the GDR and on the willingness of the East German leadership to become an intermediary between the Eastern bloc and West Berlin. However, the leadership of the GDR did everything to change the mood in West Berlin from uncertain to defiant and resistant to the Soviet proposals.

After two years of crisis over West Berlin Khrushchev believed he had a good guess as to limits to which his opponents could go. At the same time his own room of political maneuver shrunk sharply. The Crisis initially prepared the ground for the triumph of Khrushchev's personal diplomacy. But when this diplomacy collapsed in Paris, the Crisis threatened to engulf Khrushchev himself. It had to be finished without a loss of face, not only to the West, but also to distant communist friends-turning-rivals in Beijing.

Brinkmanship and the Wall

The winter of 1960-1961 was a time of Soviet diplomatic reconnaissance. Khrushchev had reasons to expect that U.S. President-elect John F. Kennedy did not see eye to eye with Adenauer on the West Berlin issue and German settlement. It has become known from recently declassified Western sources that Adenauer doubted Kennedy's resoluteness to hold firm on the German and Berlin questions.⁵⁵ The Soviets tried to exploit this uncertainty to drive the wedge deeper between the chancellor and new administration. On February 3 Andrei Gromyko submitted to the Presidium (Politburo) instructions for Soviet Ambassador in Washington Mikhail Menshikov to discuss a possible settlement in West Berlin with David Bruce, the U.S. ambassador in London.⁵⁶ Four days later Gromyko prepared a revised draft of the Central Committee motion on "Questions concerning relations between the USSR and the FRG, the German peace treaty, and West Berlin."⁵⁷ On February 11 he presented a draft of instructions to Smirnov for a conversation with Adenauer on the issue of a German peace treaty, including West Berlin, and on Soviet-West German relations.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ The Annual Report of the Soviet embassy in the GDR, 1960, 15 December 1960, TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 49, Delo 287, 11. 90, 91-92.

⁵⁵ Catudal, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, 58-62.

⁵⁶ TsKhSD, The index cards of incoming documents from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1961, No. 04260.

⁵⁷ Ibid, No. 04582.

⁵⁸ Ibid, No. 05085.

That unusual activity is suggestive evidence that Khrushchev was in the mood for a diplomatic settlement, not for ratcheting the tension in Berlin higher. At the focus of Khrushchev's attention was a new man in the White House. In part, Kennedy was "his candidate" since Khrushchev hated Nixon and did everything he could to tip the balance against him, from holding U.S. pilots as hostages to propaganda and KGB "special operations." An early profile by the Soviet embassy in Washington in July 1960 described Kennedy as a "typical pragmatist" whose election would allow "a possibility of mutually satisfactory settlement" of U.S.-Soviet relations "on the basis of mutual willingness to avoid nuclear war."⁵⁹ During his visit to the United Nations that September Khrushchev continued to collect information about Kennedy. Could he become another Roosevelt? he asked officials of the Soviet embassy.⁶⁰ Given FDR's record at Yalta and Potsdam that could only mean a possibility of a "bargain" on Germany.

Khrushchev received information that Kennedy, though vulnerable to attacks from the right, had people around him prepared to reach some sort of compromise on West Berlin. He was informed (perhaps inaccurately) that Arthur Schlesinger Jr., an assistant to the president, had told a West German journalist: "What's wrong in transferring West Berlin to the custody of the United Nations?" Schlesinger allegedly added that "this would be the best solution of the problem."⁶¹ In early February 1961 Khrushchev read a copy of a memorandum by Walt W. Rostow to Kennedy ("received confidentially" by Wladyslaw Gomulka), in which the advisor wrote that "the conclusion of a treaty with Germany seems impossible, for the Soviet Union would not agree to the principle of free elections in all Germany, but we can consider a provisional agreement on the German Question, stipulating, perhaps, a guaranteed access to West Berlin in exchange for a commitment regarding the German-Polish border." Rostow recommended "to prepare a new position for talks on the German Question, that might include the Berlin-border agreement."

Somebody (Khrushchev?) underlined the following words in the memorandum: "On the basis of these agreements and to highlight their accomplishment it would be possible to have a summit meeting and a visit by the new president to the Soviet Union. The summit could be successful only as the consequence, not as the beginning, of crucial changes in the relations with the Soviets."⁶²

When Walter Lippmann interviewed Khrushchev on 10 April 1961 he found him more confident than ever. "In contrast with 1958 when he professed to believe that the United States and Germany might attack him" now he was sure that "the threat of war from our side was dying

⁵⁹ Soviet embassy report to Gromyko, 26 July 1960, TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 30, Delo 335, 11. 96, 100, 103.

⁶⁰ Author's interview with G.M. Kornienko (then a counsellor at the Soviet embassy in Washington), May 1990.

⁶¹ A.E. Avalduev. *The memo of conversation with Politburo member E. Gluckauf*, TsKhSD, Opis 49, Delo 365, 1. 25.

⁶² P. Abrasimov, *Soviet ambassador in Poland to Khrushchev, 8 February, 1961*, TsKhSD, Opis 30, Delo 365. 11. 19, 26-27, 29.

down." In part it was a result of major Soviet breakthroughs in the arms race and space exploration. In February a successful test of the first advanced Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) took place which opened way for the deployment of an effective deterrent to match the American one. And the Soviets were preparing within days to launch the first person into space, Yuri Gagarin.

In his conversation with Lippmann Khrushchev made it clear that he dreaded the tension over Berlin but could not live with a stalemate on the German question. He acknowledged that here the United States and the Soviet Union had opposite positions, largely because the Americans supported Adenauer and viewed the FRG as a cornerstone of NATO. But, he suggested, if the United States wanted to avoid a showdown, a compromise could be within reach. If the Americans sought guarantees of their interest and prestige in West Berlin they should stop promoting West German interests there. "We are ready to take any actions that could guarantee [the] freedom and independence of West Berlin and non-interference in its affairs."⁶³

Khrushchev returned to the option that the Soviets had offered in 1959 during the Geneva conference of foreign ministers. The essence of it was a temporary agreement between the West and the Soviet Union to let two German states negotiate with each other on a form of unification, perhaps a kind of loose confederation. At the end of the fixed period of time, if a new agreement were reached, it could be embodied in a treaty. If no agreement was reached, the legal rights of occupation would lapse.

This "interim solution" was rejected by the West in 1959. But Lippmann for his part was sympathetic. As to Khrushchev, it clearly would have freed him from his commitment to the GDR: the "socialist" German state would have been recognized de facto by the West. The issue of borders would have been dropped. And, whatever the result of negotiations, the status quo on Berlin would be finished in two-three years.

When Lippmann mentioned that final decisions would be made by the president, Khrushchev insisted that the forces behind the president would determine his policy. These forces he summed up in the one word: "Rockefeller." "The view that he is running the Kennedy administration will be news to Gov. Rockefeller," commented Lippmann.⁶⁴ Yet for Khrushchev this crude view of U.S. political system represented actually a big advancement. He believed that the forces behind the Kennedy Administration, like the U.S. president himself, despite their "imperialistic nature," were not impervious to common sense. Confronted with a dilemma--a mutually advantageous deal over West Berlin or Soviet unilateral actions there--they would accept the former. Khrushchev stressed again and again that a threat of war over West Berlin was

⁶³ Quotations from the Soviet transcript of conversation, 10 April 1961, in Lippmann papers, Series VII, box 239, f. 30, Sterling Library, Yale University.

⁶⁴ "Khrushchev to Lippmann - Face to Face," *The New York Herald Tribune*, 17 April 1961.

merely a bluff. "In my opinion there are no such stupid statesmen in the West to unleash a war in which hundreds of million would perish just because we would sign a peace treaty with the GDR that would stipulate a special status of 'free city' for West Berlin with its 2.5 million population ... There are no such idiots or they have not yet been born."⁶⁵

The conviction that only a show of force could make "ruling circles" in the United States change their mind guided many of Khrushchev's actions. The definition of those hidden influences varied, however, and that affected Khrushchev's estimate of the power relations in the United States. His impression of them as inherently rational had been formed by the years of confrontation with John Foster Dulles. Somehow Khrushchev got the impression that by the end of his life the secretary of state changed his mind and supported the idea of negotiations with the Soviets. Why? Clearly because of the new strength of Moscow. Underlining that strength, Khrushchev vowed to Lippmann that even the nuclear armament of the Bundeswehr would not stop the Soviets from signing a separate treaty. But he made it clear that any agreement on Germany over the FRG's head would be easier to reach before the FRG became a nuclear power.

Shortly after his interview with Lippmann, Khrushchev observed American-sponsored invasion to Cuba and Kennedy's unwillingness to support it with air-cover. The invasion plans had not been a secret to him: Soviet intelligence informed him in advance. Kennedy's conduct, according to Troyanovsky, must have supported Khrushchev's lowest expectations. Kennedy was weak: he inherited Eisenhower's plans against Cuba and did not have the will to cancel them. At the same time he lacked Eisenhower's resolve to bring it to a successive conclusion.⁶⁶

Did it mean also that Kennedy could not resist the pressure of those whom Eisenhower called "the military-industrial complex"? When Kennedy agreed to have an early summit in Vienna, Khrushchev still expected that the U.S. president would bring something interesting on Germany in his portfolio. Instead, Kennedy came to the meeting on 2-3 June 1961 with just two issues, Laos and a test-ban treaty. He suggested an across-the-board status quo, a geopolitical standstill between the United States and the Soviet Union--which meant a renegeing on Eisenhower's acknowledgment of "abnormal situation" in West Berlin.

Khrushchev was frustrated. It looked as if Kennedy was even worse than Eisenhower: a young man in "short pants," without real experience in world affairs, vulnerable to powerful forces beyond his control. The U.S. president failed to appreciate Khrushchev's good will. And he perhaps failed to understand the simple message. In a sign of his anger, Khrushchev violated diplomatic etiquette and repeatedly used the word "war" to signal to Kennedy the price for his stubbornness on West Berlin and the GDR.

⁶⁵ Soviet transcript of conversation between Khrushchev and Lippmann, 10 April 1961 Lippmann papers, Yale University.

⁶⁶ Author's interview with Troyanovsky (who was in Vienna in 1961) on 30 March 1993, Washington, DC.

The failure of another summit left Khrushchev no more room for procrastination. Fulfilling his commitments to the GDR leadership he released his *aide-memoire* that renewed an ultimatum to the West about a German peace treaty.

Pressure on him to act had been mounting. In the spring of 1961 the flight of refugees from the GDR over West Berlin had become an acute embarrassment. Even Khrushchev's aides joked that "soon there will be nobody left in the GDR except for Ulbricht and his mistress."⁶⁷ In addition, there was a big concern that Soviet assistance to the GDR would end up in the pockets of West Berliners and West German tourists due to the huge gap in purchasing power between Western and Eastern marks. The Soviet embassy in the GDR reported to the leadership that material factors were not enough to explain this exodus.⁶⁸ Yuri Andropov, head of the International Department of the Central Committee in charge of relations with "fraternal parties," was about to come to conclusion about the futility of "pump-priming" the East German economy; a year later he reported that the amount of Soviet loans to the GDR was bigger per capita than Western aid to the FRG.⁶⁹ Cautiously Andropov refrained from explicitly drawing conclusions from these statistics, and it is not difficult to guess why. Khrushchev, contrary to the facts, doggedly believed that the GDR problems stemmed from "unfair" terms of economic competition between two German states.⁷⁰

In May the Soviets allowed the GDR to take actions against *grenzgangers*, East Berliners who worked in Berlin and earned Western money but enjoyed Eastern subsidized prices. But, the Soviet ambassador stressed, the problem of West Berlin had to be solved through economic, not administrative measures. When Ulbricht and his subordinates complained that the flight of refugees was a net drain on their economy,⁷¹ the embassy referred those complaints to Moscow with a skeptical comment that economic problems of the GDR were "slightly exaggerated."⁷² Earlier, in March, a meeting of Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) been convened at the demand of Ulbricht. The GDR leader proposed to close the sectoral border to put an end to the

⁶⁷ Interview with Troyanovsky, 23 March 23 1993, Washington, DC.

⁶⁸ M. Pervukhin, "On the question of the exodus of the GDR population to West Germany," 7 April 1960, TsKhSD, fond 5, opis 59, delo 380, 11. 59-70. Many Soviet sources stressed bureaucratism and other factors forcing intellectuals to flee from the GDR. According to Otto Neumann, a member of the Politburo of SED, "some scientists, thinking about their future, believe that 'life in the West' is better, more comfortable,...they allegedly can live freer and simpler life, satisfy their needs, not only material, but also spiritual," *A.I. Gorchakov, Counsellor-Envoy of the Soviet embassy in the GDR, 28 March 1961*, TsKhSD, fond 5, Opis 49, Delo 380, 1. 52.

⁶⁹ By 1962 the Soviet loans to the GDR amounted to 6.8 billion Deutchmarks: Yu. Andropov, *The Report of International Department, 16 March 1962*, TsKhSD, Fond 4, Opis 18, Delo 103, 1. 129-132.

⁷⁰ *Khrushchev Remembers: The Glasnost Tapes*, 164-65.

⁷¹ *From the diary of P.P. Sorokin, conversation with Dolus, 27 July 1961; From the diary of T.P. Bobirev, Memorandum of conversation with Ulbricht, 27 June 1961*, TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 49, Delo 376, 11. 71-73, 76-77.

⁷² *From the diary of Pervukhin, 22 March 1961*, TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 49, Delo 377, 1. 21.

exodus. Leaders of other socialist countries argued against the closing of the borders with West Berlin.⁷³ At that time Khrushchev still supported them.

On July 25 Kennedy came up with an ultimatum of his own. He stressed that any unilateral Soviet action against West Berlin would mean war with the United States and announced a panoply of military preparations to make this linkage look credible. John McCloy, the U.S. disarmament negotiator, happened to be a witness of Khrushchev's reaction when he heard the news. Khrushchev had brought McCloy to his summer resort on the Black Sea in hopes of persuading a famous representative of "Wall Street" (that, as he believed, stood behind both political parties in the United States) to reconsider the American position of inflexibility on Germany and West Berlin. Instead, he subjected McCloy to a long harangue to show McCloy that the Soviet leadership was not afraid of the U.S. bluff. Ten days later he recalled the episode before the leaders of the WTO countries: "Kennedy in his speech declared war on us and set down his conditions," Khrushchev said. In response he told McCloy to report to Kennedy that "we accept his ultimatum and his terms and will respond in kind." McCloy then said that "Kennedy did not mean it, he meant to negotiate." Khrushchev asked if McCloy read the speech. "He faltered [*zamialsia*], for clearly he knew about the content of the speech."⁷⁴

In conversation with McCloy Khrushchev, in the best traditions of John Foster Dulles, tried to outbid Kennedy's brinkmanship. "We will not declare war," he told the U.S. negotiator, "but we will not withdraw either, if you push it on us. We will respond to your war in kind." Khrushchev asked McCloy to tell Kennedy that if he starts a war then he would probably become the last president of the United States of America." He added: "I know he reported it accurately."⁷⁵

The Kennedy's speech, however, changed Khrushchev's perceptions of the forces at play in the United States. He shared his new perceptions several days later with Italian Prime Minister Amintori Fanfani (and later repeated his comments at the WTO meeting). The American state "is a barely governed state," he said, and Kennedy himself "hardly influences the direction and development of policies." The U.S. Senate and other state organizations are "very similar to our Veche of Novgorod" [a governing body in Kievan Rus' City-Republic] where when one party "defeated the other when it tore off half of beards of another party."⁷⁶

⁷³ On the arguments of socialist leaders see Catudal, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, 50.

⁷⁴ *The conference of first secretaries of Central Committee of Communist and Workers Parties of socialist countries for exchange of views on the questions related to preparation and conclusion of German peace treaty, 3-5 August 1961* [Transcripts of the Meeting were found in the miscellaneous documents of the International Department of the Central Committee, TsKhSD] (hereafter "Transcripts") 11. 142, 143.

⁷⁵ "Transcripts," 11. 143-144.

⁷⁶ "Transcripts," 11. 156-57.

The belief that the power relations in the United States were in chaos was frightening to the unquestionable ruler of the Soviet Union. What would be the consequences of this chaos for international relations if not instability and danger of war? "Hence everything is possible in the United States," he admitted. "War is also possible. They can unleash it. There are more stable situations in England, France, Italy, Germany."⁷⁷

Khrushchev admitted that under Eisenhower and Dulles the situation had been more predictable. "When our 'friend' Dulles was alive, there were more stability." Khrushchev spoke nostalgically about Dulles's tenure as a time when both sides could be sure that, despite harsh rhetoric, forces of war were under firm control. Dulles, he said "would reach the brink, as he put it himself, but he would never leap over the brink, and still retained his credibility."⁷⁸

But, he continued, if Kennedy pulled back from the brink, "he will be called a coward." The new U.S. president was, in Khrushchev's estimate, not a match for the huge military-industrial complex that his predecessors had nourished, and "rather an unknown quantity in politics." Khrushchev even expressed sympathy for a young, inexperienced Kennedy who, for all his good intentions, was "too much of a light-weight." "And the state" he added, "is too big, the state is powerful, and it poses certain dangers."⁷⁹

The danger of nuclear war made Khrushchev prudent. However, it was the danger of spontaneous or accidental conflict, as the previous quotation suggests, not U.S. or Soviet nuclear superiority, that bothered Khrushchev most. Unlike Ulbricht, he did not even talk about the nuclear balance. Leaders and forces who could unleash a war seemed in his eyes to be more important factors than the number of nuclear missiles or warheads.⁸⁰

This shift in perceptions forced Khrushchev to reconsider his whole gamble on Germany. If this show of force failed to sober up American "ruling circles" and, perhaps, even made Kennedy a hostage of militaristic elements in his own government, then the Berlin Crisis had to be concluded at minimal cost to the Soviet side. After his meeting with McCloy, Khrushchev, on the spur of the moment, returned to Ulbricht's proposal about stopping the exodus to West Berlin. He described what happened in his memoirs. "I spoke to Pervukhin, our ambassador in Germany, about the establishment of border control." It seems, although Khrushchev does not mention it, that he decided to leave his personal imprint on Ulbricht's idea. Instead of just barbed-wire installations between East and West Berlin he proposed a concrete wall. The Soviet ambassador for whom the idea was a bolt from the blue was not even prepared for the discussion: "He gave me a map of West Berlin. The map was very poor." Khrushchev then asked Pervukhin to share

⁷⁷ Ibidem, 1. 157.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, 11. 157, 158.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, 1. 159.

⁸⁰ This assessment accords with the tentative conclusions of Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 365-66, 378-81.

the idea with Ulbricht "and also to ask Marshal [Ivan I.] Yakubovsky [commander of Soviet troops in Germany] to send me a new map." Marshal Yakubovsky worked out "the actual plan" on the division of Berlin. "Ulbricht beamed with pleasure," as Khrushchev recalled. "This is the solution! This will help. I am for this."

Years later Khrushchev was still defensive about this decision. "If we had decided to have a military confrontation" over West Berlin, he wrote, "the question would quickly have been resolved in our favor." But this, he adds, "would have been only the starting point. It would have meant shooting on some scale, large or small. War might have broken out." His only intention at this point was to move out of the crisis area. "We didn't want a military conflict," he stressed. "We only wanted to conduct a surgical operation."⁸¹

The Soviet leader was fearful of leaks. Perhaps he was afraid that "dark forces" in the United States, if they learned about the "surgical operation," would redraw the line and declare the closing of sectoral border another pretext for military confrontation? Or was it a strong habit of secrecy that became almost an instinct? Whatever the reason, Khrushchev ordered Pervukhin to keep it a secret, even from other members of the Presidium (Politburo) in Moscow. He intended to unveil the plan at the conference of the leaders of Warsaw Treaty Organization in early August. In the event the secret was kept. Even Oleg Penkovsky, the highly-placed British spy in the Soviet military, learned about it too late to report to the West.

The conference of leaders of the socialist bloc in Moscow was held on August 3-5. From the very start Khrushchev supported Ulbricht and criticized unnamed leaders of Eastern European socialist countries for "national narrow-mindedness" in their approach to the GDR's difficulties.⁸² Ulbricht made his prepared address, demanding to sign the treaty without delay. He urged the whole socialist bloc to risk confrontation with the FRG and the United States to protect the East Germany. Ulbricht urged all socialist countries to get ready for a Western economic blockade and asked Soviet leaders to give aid to the GDR in roll metal and steel, and to send, along with Bulgaria, 50,000 workers to fill out the gaps in labor force.⁸³

It is not clear if the whole speech was a part of a staged performance. The available transcripts of the meeting do not contain a single word on the imminent construction of the Wall. Since the decision had been made before the meeting, it is obvious that Khrushchev must have wanted to "sell" it to the leaders of the communist bloc without losing his prestige. The Chinese ambassador sat at the meeting without uttering a word. He could have said that not only Kennedy, but Khrushchev himself, was a "lightweight" afraid to fight with imperialists. And one country in Europe, Albania, had already switched its allegiance from Moscow to Beijing, calling

⁸¹ *Glasnost Tapes*, 169-70.

⁸² On the background of this meeting see Catudal, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, 49-50.

⁸³ "Transcripts," 11. 52, 67-69, 75, 79, 92, 94.

Khrushchev a "traitor" and "revisionist." Before this audience, Khrushchev leaned over backwards to show that he was not afraid of war. In a well-rehearsed manner he shouted:

I wish we could knock imperialism down! You can imagine what satisfaction we'll get when we sign the peace treaty. Of course we're running a risk. But it is indispensable. Lenin took such a risk, when he said in 1917 that there was such a party that could seize power.

He spent considerable time telling the delegates that it was the West who feared more. "People close to Kennedy," he said, "are beginning to pour cold water like a fire-brigade."⁸⁴ Even at this stage Khrushchev defended his general assumption that a demonstration of power would bring the West to a negotiating table. To support his words, he sanctioned unilateral resumption of nuclear tests at the end of August.

The construction of the Wall began on 13 August 1961. The failure of the West to react to it other than verbally meant that Khrushchev's plan succeeded. From Soviet diplomats and intelligence Khrushchev learned that the idea of "something like a Wall" had indeed been afloat in political Washington, especially among people close to or part of the Kennedy Administration, among them Sen. William Fulbright and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr.⁸⁵ Khrushchev also studied a KGB report on a conference of Western powers in Paris on August 5-7. Soviet intelligence found out that Western powers were not ready to risk a war over West Berlin. Secretary of State Dean Rusk had proposed economic sanctions "to spread discontent throughout Eastern Europe, particularly in Poland and Czechoslovakia" and to speed up the nuclear armament of NATO countries, a euphemism for the nuclearization of West Germany. Unlike West German foreign minister Heinrich von Brentano, who insisted on a show of force, Rusk "spoke in favor of talks with the Soviet Union about preservation of the status quo."⁸⁶

Khrushchev still did not repeal his June ultimatum. But he clearly preferred to negotiate his way out of the crisis. Soon contacts with the United States led to Gromyko-Rusk talks on Germany and West Berlin. He believed the peak of confrontation with the United States had passed, a perception that did not change during the October 26-27 tank stand-off in Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie. Khrushchev, tipped off by erroneous Soviet intelligence, believed that Lucius Clay, a commander of the U.S. forces in West Berlin, was ready to storm the Wall by force.

⁸⁴ "Transcripts", 1. 144. This remark reveals, incidentally, how the Soviet leadership reacted to the interview of Senator William Fulbright and other "leaks" that Kennedy's advisers were not prepared to go to war over West Berlin; see Catudal, *Kennedy and the Berlin Wall Crisis*, 201.

⁸⁵ See, G.M. Kornienko, "Upushchennaiia vozmozhnost" [Missed Opportunity. A meeting of Khrushchev and Kennedy in Vienna in 1961], *Novaiia i Noveishaia Istoriia* 2 (1992), 102-103.

⁸⁶ *Gen.-Lt. A. Rogov (GRU) to R. Malinovsky, 24 August 1961 (ed. note: Khrushchev learned about it from earlier memos from the KGB)*, TsKhSD, Fond 5, Opis 30, Delo 365, 11. 142-153.

Persuaded that Kennedy was not personally behind the ploy, the Soviet leader contacted him and the confrontation was quickly resolved.⁸⁷

At the same time Khrushchev made an important choice: convinced that no compromise could be reached with the Chinese communist leaders, he decided to stop looking over his shoulder at them. During the XXII Congress of the CPSU in October Western observers expected Khrushchev to announce a separate peace treaty with the GDR. It never happened. Instead the Chinese delegation, headed by Prime Minister Zhou Enlai, left Moscow in a huff, to the accompaniment of Khrushchev's anti-Maoist and anti-Stalinist salvos. From this moment forward Khrushchev stopped looking at the Berlin crisis against the backdrop of his rivalry with the Chinese. This was a second major shift after Kennedy's speech in July 25 that contributed to his departure from brinkmanship back to diplomacy from a position of strength.

Still, Khrushchev did not propose a compromise package on West Berlin, although at that time the Kennedy Administration, according to McGeorge Bundy, was more interested in such a deal than Kennedy ever let on publicly. Perhaps, Khrushchev was waiting for Washington to start talking about this compromise.⁸⁸ In any case, the Rusk-Gromyko talks, which started in New York in September 1961, quickly bogged down in fruitless verbiage.

Khrushchev's decision to wind down the crisis reopened the old discrepancy between the Soviet policies in Germany and the designs of Walter Ulbricht. The closing of the sectoral border was only the first stage in Ulbricht's plan to coerce West Berlin into submission. He and other East German communists took the passive reaction of the U.S. and Western Europe to the construction of the Wall as a political triumph. Erich Honecker, who was in charge of the operation, declared at the meeting of the communist bloc's diplomatic corps that West Berlin was to become a "small village."⁸⁹ Some Czechoslovak diplomats in East Berlin, according to their Soviet colleagues, had sarcastically remarked that "the reverse development is likely,"--i.e., West Berlin would turn into "an international center of Western culture and international meetings"⁹⁰--a prognosis with which the Soviet embassy seemed to agree.⁹¹

At first the GDR leadership did not feel that Khrushchev's perception of the global correlation of forces had drastically changed. At the meeting in Moscow Khrushchev did not mince words to praise the "heroic" deeds of Comrade Ulbricht, and he approved his move to collective East German farms. "We have to give aid to the GDR," he reasoned, affirmatively answering two questions: does one need the GDR as the first line of defense and does one have to maintain the already high living standards in the GDR at the expense of the USSR and other

⁸⁷ Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 334-36; Garthoff, "Berlin 1961."

⁸⁸ Bundy, *Danger and Survival*, 385.

⁸⁹ Pervukhin to Andropov, 23 September 1961, TsKhSD, fond 5, opis 49, delo 365, 11. 190-201.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 1. 249.

⁹¹ Ibid, Delo 386, 11. 234, 241.

East European countries? As in 1953, Khrushchev underscored that scrapping socialist rule in East Germany and lowering living standards down to the East European median level would mean East Germany's eventual engulfment by West Germany. That, he said, would create an intolerable strategic situation, when "the Bundeswehr would advance to the borders of Poland and Czechoslovakia and therefore "nearer to our Soviet border."⁹²

Perhaps still fearing a "China virus" in East Germany, after the construction of the Wall Khrushchev personally saw to it that Ulbricht would be treated as a full-fledged ally without any slight. He ordered aides to share with him information about Soviet contacts with West German and U.S. diplomats and he allowed the borders with West Berlin to be guarded by East German troops. But after the Party Congress in October, as months went by, Khrushchev let Ulbricht know that the Soviet Union would not support or tolerate any provocations on the part of the GDR against West Berlin. In May 1962 Ulbricht told Pervukhin and another Soviet official that if the tension around the Wall were aggravated any further, "then he would not feel responsibility for possible complications and any unwelcome situation."⁹³ This information caused a mini-crisis in Soviet-East German relations. The issue was put on the Presidium (Politburo) agenda and Pervukhin was instructed to warn Ulbricht that any actions regarding West Berlin had to be cleared with the Soviet side. On 1 June 1962 Ulbricht felt he had to explain this incident to Khrushchev in a personal letter blaming the Soviet ambassador for distorting his message and misinforming Khrushchev.

These remarks concerned the dangerous situation on the state border of the GDR with West Berlin. We were and still are concerned that petty provocations of the adversary on the border could lead to big political and military consequences.⁹⁴

On 6-9 June 1962 Ulbricht visited Moscow, speaking to Khrushchev, Alexei Kosygin, Gromyko and Marshal Ivan Konev. No documents on these conversations have been found. Still, it is plausible to suggest, that some sort of unwritten agreement was reached on the status quo in Berlin.

This episode might be considered as the concluding chapter in the long history of the Berlin Crisis. When, during the dark week of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Gromyko's deputy, Vassily Kuznetsov, suggested that the Soviets might do something against West Berlin to call the American bluff in Cuba, Khrushchev sharply rejected his idea.⁹⁵ Contrary to a view of the

⁹² Transcripts, 11. 165, 168, 170.

⁹³ I. Kabin, head of sector in International Department of the Central Committee, Information # 21763, 4 June 1962, TsKhSD, Opis 49, Delo 488, 1. 5.

⁹⁴ Ulbricht to Khrushchev, 1 June 1962, TsKhSD, Opis 49, Delo 488, 11. 1-4.

⁹⁵ Oleg A. Troyanovsky, "The Caribbean Crisis: a View from the Kremlin" *Mezhdunarodnaia zhizn* (International affairs, Moscow) 3-4 (1992), 174.

distinguished historian Adam Ulam,⁹⁶ Khrushchev did not unleash the crisis in Cuba to reach his goal in Berlin. This goal had been reached with the construction of the Wall and meant the recognition of what Kennedy offered and Khrushchev rejected during the Vienna summit --a continuation of the status quo.

Conclusion

The Berlin Crisis was not a product of Khrushchev's bad temper. He started the Crisis because he was genuinely concerned by West German designs against the GDR and for nuclear armament. Even the threat of the "loss" of the GDR was intolerable in those times for the Soviet leadership. Inspired in all likelihood by the crisis in the Far East, Khrushchev hoped to force the United States to acquiesce to the existence of "two Germanys" just as they had acquiesced in, indeed supported the existence of, "two Chinas" in the Far East.

Khrushchev always expected to manage the Crisis without resorting to brinkmanship with the United States. In the first year of the Crisis his diplomacy scored an unexpected success: the trip to the United States and Eisenhower's acceptance of a return invitation to come to the Soviet Union. But during the second year, when the U-2 incident occurred and the prospect of detente faded, Khrushchev found himself a hostage of his political and ideological commitments. Instead of maintaining the tension to bring the West to the negotiating table, the Soviet leader tied his own hands by a promising to sign a separate peace treaty with the GDR. As Sino-Soviet relations deteriorated, many in the Kremlin, including Khrushchev himself, began to wonder if it would not be better to ally the Soviet foreign policy with a militant Chinese line rather than to continue to play diplomatic games with the West. The pressures from Ulbricht certainly contributed to this dilemma.

These pressures on Khrushchev explain why he quickly turned to brinkmanship in the summer of 1961, when a new U.S. president, John Kennedy, rejected his proposals to negotiate a compromise on Germany. But even then Khrushchev did not succumb to the idea of annexing West Berlin: he preferred to keep it as a "free city" in order to leave open the chances of a compromise on Germany with the West.

Two factors, in addition to the ever mounting loss of human and material resources, contributed to Khrushchev's decision not to sign a separate treaty with the GDR, and to build the Wall in Berlin instead. First was his changed perception of forces at play in the United States. Kennedy's show of force on July 25 persuaded him that the old stability of mutual nuclear bluff was gone and perhaps it was time to refrain from brinkmanship altogether. The second factor was Khrushchev's growing conviction that reconciliation with the PRC was possible only at a price of

⁹⁶ Adam Ulam, *Expansion and Coexistence*, 668-72.

his capitulation and renunciation of the whole concept of "peaceful coexistence." In October 1961 he finally stopped catering to the Chinese and, instead, counterattacked them.

Both new developments allowed Khrushchev to regain control over a Berlin Crisis that earlier threatened to become unmanageable. Soviet assistance and the closed border in Berlin helped Ulbricht consolidate communist control in the GDR. The negotiations with the United States on Germany began. With these achievements at hand, Khrushchev could bring the Crisis to its conclusion.

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