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NEGOTIATING HISTORY OF BERLIN CRISIS SINCE
NOVEMBER, 1958

Introduction

The development of the Western position for discussions with the Soviets has recurrently run into difficulties since the Soviets first launched their offensive against the Western position in Berlin during November 1958. The Soviet objectives in this situation, as well as the geographical and political factors involved, have been so limiting that a certain lack of scope and imagination has seemed to characterize the Western approach in the eyes of its critics. Their criticism may be valid to the degree that such qualities derive from the bureaucratic machinery through which policy must filter, but applied to the U.S. it overlooks the fact that practically every significant initiative suggested over the past four years has come from us, has usually had the timid support of the U.K., and the opposition, more or less categorical, of the Germans and the French. Without consistent U.S. prodding, the Western Powers would have long since frozen into immobility.

Ever since the British drew such a blast of criticism after they had floated their ill-advised "slippery slope" memorandum in December 1958 (in effect it advocated de facto recognition of the GDR in exchange for a satisfactory Berlin arrangement rather than slide down to the slope to the former without getting the latter) and Macmillan had made his visit to Moscow in early 1959, they have been reluctant to do little beyond making small suggestions at the quadripartite fringes or bilateral proposals to us which they hope we can be persuaded to sponsor.

The present paper is not an attempt to discuss the substantive merits of proposals, but rather an attempt to recapitulate the negotiating history of the Berlin crisis since November 1958. A synoptic presentation of the various possible Western proposals which have been considered, or at least proposed for consideration, since then, is appended.

The Development of the Crisis

The Berlin crisis has gone through five broad phases.

a. Following the Soviet note of November 27, 1958 there was an initial period of mutual restatement of position and exchanges of notes leading up to the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers, which began on May 11, 1959. This was a period of intensive diplomatic activity among the Western Powers during which they drew up the Western Peace Plan.

b. The period

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b. The period of the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers (May-August 1959) during the course of which the West agreed to discuss Berlin outside the context of German reunification and advanced proposals (rejected by the Soviets) for an "interim arrangement" on Berlin.

c. The period between the Camp David talks and the collapse of the Paris Summit Meeting in May 1960. This likewise was a period of intensive diplomatic activity and many preparatory meetings.

d. The post-Summit period of relative diplomatic quiescence and of further Soviet postponement of threatened unilateral action pending the new American Administration.

e. The period of discussion with the Soviets beginning with the June 4, 1961 meeting between the President and Khrushchev in Vienna and continuing through the fall meetings between the Secretary and Gromyko in New York, between Ambassador Thompson and Gromyko in the winter in Moscow, between the Secretary and Gromyko in Geneva in March, between the Secretary and Dobrynin in Washington in April, May, June, and July, and between the Secretary and Gromyko in Geneva in July. This has also been a period of much diplomatic activity and many preparatory meetings.

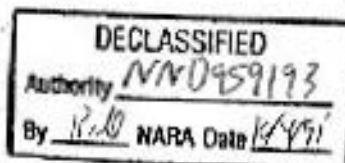
The Western Approach

From the outset, the Four Western Powers principally concerned have differed to some extent both in their appraisal of the situation and their estimate of desirable policy. The British have been most willing to compromise in order to achieve a solution; but after the unfavorable reception given to their "slippery slope" memorandum of late 1958 (which in effect advocated trading recognition of the GDR for a Berlin settlement), they have been reticent to expose their basic thinking. The French and Germans, on the other hand, have been consistently negative in opposing the introduction of any elements of flexibility into the Western position, either on Germany as a whole or on Berlin in particular. The United States has shown itself more willing at least to consider possible new approaches provided they seemed compatible with basic Western interests, and has had to provide much of the initiative needed to organize the work during the preparatory phases of conferences and less formal negotiations.

In developing the Western position on Germany and Berlin, the Four Powers have passed through phases somewhat analogous to the five noted above. During the initial phase prior to the Geneva Conference of Foreign Ministers, the West still operated essentially on the assumption that discussion of the Berlin problem should be kept within the context of the all-German question. Within the State Department various new ideas were considered for incorporation into a Western package proposal to replace the

Eden Plan

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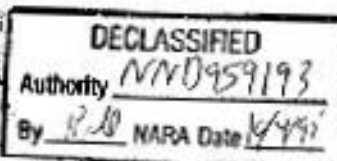
Eden Plan of the 1955 Geneva Conference. After months of discussions within a series of Four Power Working Group sessions in Washington, Paris, and London, some of these ideas survived in the Western Peace Plan put forward at Geneva on May 14, 1959. It is highly questionable whether even a more forthcoming version of the Peace Plan (still consistent with basic Western interests) would have proved at all negotiable with the Soviets, although the Western package would have been more appealing as propaganda. At any rate, after a few weeks of inconclusive discussion of the German questions at Geneva, with the Soviets emphasizing the necessity of a peace treaty and all-German talks and the West extolling the merits of the Peace Plan, the conference moved on to the subject of Berlin proper for a wearisome and protracted period. Despite the concern which they caused the Germans and the Berliners, the Western proposals for an interim arrangement on Berlin might have provided a satisfactory modus vivendi for a period of some years. However, it became clear at Geneva that the Soviet concept of an interim arrangement differed too basically from that of the West to make agreement possible.

At the subsequent Camp David talks, the only agreement reached on Berlin was that negotiations would be reopened with a view to achieving a solution in accordance with the interests of all concerned and in the interest of the maintenance of peace. After an involved preparatory process, the preferred Western objective on Berlin for the Summit emerged as an agreement for a standstill for a period of time during which an attempt might be made at a lower level to achieve progress toward a more formal agreement. The basic Western position paper did, however, allow for the possibility that the Western Powers might have to discuss an arrangement along the lines of their Geneva proposals of July 28, preferably with certain improvements. It also left open the possibility, under certain circumstances, of reviving the old Solution C of the London Working Group of April, 1959.

At the Paris meeting of the Four Power Working Group in July and August 1961, the four Foreign Ministers agreed that the Washington Ambassadorial Group should work on possible negotiating positions involving primarily a revision of the Western Peace Plan, but also an all-German plebiscite offer, an all-Berlin proposal, an arrangement limited to Berlin protecting the three vital interests in a modus vivendi to be negotiated with the USSR prior to signature of a separate treaty, and Solution C.

At the Washington meeting of the Four Power Working Group in September 1961, the four Foreign Ministers approved the revised presentation of the Western Peace Plan on a tentative basis and directed the Ambassadorial Group: to consider it further; to study a possible role for the UN in Berlin; to consider an all-German plebiscite on a peace treaty; to give further consideration to a West Berlin plebiscite and a proposal for a reunification of Berlin; and to study further Solution C.

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At the Paris meeting of the Four Power Working Group in December 1961, the four Senior Officials noted that the various assignments given the Ambassadorial Group in September were not developed intensively because of the growing consensus that possible negotiations should proceed on a narrow basis, which had led to concentration on the "substantive paper" (including a refinement of the three vital interests), which was presented in the Working Group Report.

This quadripartitely-worked-out "substantive paper" was consistent with the US developed "principles paper", as was the German aide-memoire presented in Geneva in March just before the Secretary gave the "principles paper" to Gromyko. Another unilaterally developed US paper was the ten-point Four Power declaration.

Another aspect of this problem which has received consideration since November 1958 and during the most recent phase has been possible counters to the separate peace treaty. The Four Western Powers have been unable to reach a consensus as to the kind of political gesture that might appropriately be made and which, apart from its propaganda aspects, might actually have some effect on the Soviet course of action. A number of possibilities which have been suggested are included in the Synopsis of Possible Western Proposals (attached).

Attachment:

Synopsis of Possible Western Proposals

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August 6, 1962