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Soviet Intentions With Respect to Berlin

Submitted by the
DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

Concurred in by the
UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

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SOVIET INTENTIONS WITH RESPECT TO BERLIN

THE PROBLEM

To estimate probable Soviet intentions over the next few months with respect to the Berlin and German questions.

THE ESTIMATE

1. Khrushchev has probably concluded that US-Soviet talks, as they have been proceeding since last fall, offer little chance of gaining a Berlin agreement on terms favorable to the USSR. He probably believes that to continue the talks much longer without any demonstrable gains would give the impression that the USSR feared to make good on its commitment to solve the Berlin problem with or without the Western Powers. At present, therefore, the USSR is almost certainly considering new decisions on its tactics for the next phase of the Berlin crisis.

I. THE IMMEDIATE OUTLOOK

2. From the present point the Soviets could proceed along one of three general lines. First, if they concluded that the risks of forward action were too high, they could hold tensions in check and continue negotiations in a relatively low key, perhaps in some new forum. Second, they could embark at once on the long-threatened course of a separate peace treaty. Third, they could seek to change the circumstances surrounding further negotiations by raising harassments and pressures to a much higher level, reserving a final decision on a separate treaty and its precise terms until they discovered whether these harsher tactics produced concessions.

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3. *Continued Stalemate.* The Soviets have not closed the door to further talks, and we cannot exclude the possibility that they will simply allow the present stalemated negotiations to continue without an appreciable increase in tensions. But the deliberate manner in which they have sharpened the issue in recent weeks, and the line taken in the Rusk-Gromyko talks, indicate that the Soviets are unlikely to adopt this alternative. Their hard stance, both in public and in negotiations, has implied a willingness to raise tensions further now that a point of deadlock has been reached.

4. *Separate Treaty.* To proceed forthwith to a separate treaty presents the same problems it always has for the Soviet leaders. We believe that the Soviets continue to appreciate the risks involved in giving the East Germans control over allied access and then requiring the Western Powers to deal with those authorities. At the same time, however, the Soviets have intentionally given the peace treaty an importance as an end in itself, and have thereby increased their commitment to take this step. We have no evidence that Khrushchev has yet made a decision to carry through with his threat to sign a treaty. But we believe that it is possible that the Soviets may at any time set on foot the procedures involved in signing the separate treaty.

5. *Increased Pressures.* On the whole, however, we believe it is somewhat more likely that the Soviets will instead first resort to sharply heightened pressures, in one more effort to extract concessions from the West. In doing this they would defer for a period, probably relatively brief, a decision on the treaty and its precise terms. The Soviets are probably convinced that no important change in the Western position can be obtained without greatly increased pressures, probably in the form of harassments to impair allied access or unilateral encroachments on Western rights. In the latter category they might, for example, close off East Berlin to Western military traffic, withdraw from the Berlin Air Safety Center, or associate the East Germans more actively with the administration of access controls. Such steps could be accompanied by propaganda intended to create an atmosphere of imminent showdown. This line of action would be intended

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not only to probe Western reaction and convey the Soviets' determination to settle Berlin on their own terms, but also to accomplish gradually some of the final objectives of a peace treaty by liquidating certain aspects of four-power responsibility.

6. In pursuing this line of increased pressures the primary Soviet aim would still be to extract concessions from the West. Khrushchev would be prepared for a period of very high tensions, but would still be careful to maintain contacts with the US. The Soviets might at this stage make at least ostensible adjustments toward moderating their negotiating position. An additional possibility, which the Soviets have already hinted at, would be to involve the UN in this phase, hoping to capitalize on worldwide concern over growing East-West tensions. They might believe, for example, that a UN majority could be won for a "compromise" which would replace Western occupation rights with some form of UN role, limited in duration, based on Warsaw Pact and neutral forces as well as Western troops. Moreover, they might expect that if the UN was seized with the crisis, the West could be inhibited from reacting too sharply to a separate treaty.

7. The Soviet leaders probably have some doubts that even heightened pressures will bring about important changes in the Western attitude. Moreover, they recognize that at some point along this road the risks might become uncontrollable. Nevertheless, they probably believe that certain harassments and limited unilateral steps which would heighten pressures considerably can be controlled. And they probably believe that such measures are preferable at this time to the alternatives of appearing to acquiesce in further Western stalling, or proceeding at once with a separate treaty without having fully tested Western resistance to particular kinds of pressure.

II. PROBABLE SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

8. In any event, we believe that during the next few months the Soviets will hold the door open to further negotiations, if only to maintain a degree of control over the situation. If

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they intensify pressure, they would see continued talks as the means to collect any concessions, or at least to assess the impact of their actions. They would wish, for example, to discover what modalities of control by East Germany would be tolerated by the Western Powers. Even if they proceed toward a separate treaty, they would hold out the possibility of negotiations should the West decide to change its position as a showdown approached. Or, if the Soviets should decide to allow tensions to subside at some point, they would consider further talks as necessary to cover their retreat.

9. If, as seems likely, a period of sharper action is beginning, the Soviets will be reassessing their position and tactics continuously over the next few months. Although much would depend upon circumstances at the time, if the Soviets pursued such tactics for a period without significant success, they would then be more likely to move ahead and conclude a separate treaty than to accept once again the loss of prestige involved in a retreat before Western firmness.

10. Should the Soviets decide to proceed with a separate treaty, this course would still be subject to reappraisal at each stage in the process. They would still seek to gain last minute concessions, and would manipulate the various procedures for convening a conference, signing a treaty, and implementing it in such a way as to permit a change of course if they perceived an important shift in Western attitudes.

11. In any case, we do not believe that the Soviets are likely to abandon the caution which has characterized their approach to situations involving a direct East-West confrontation. They almost certainly recognize that the balance of military power has undergone no change which would justify this. In undertaking unilateral encroachments or a separate treaty they would seek to minimize the risks. Thus they might finally decide that an abbreviated treaty, which altered the conditions of access but stopped short of a complete or immediate turnover of controls to the East Germans, would be a sufficient advance, at least for the time being.

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