

# FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, BERLIN CRISIS, 1958–1959, VOLUME VIII

## 135. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>9</sup>

Washington, January 16, 1959, 10:30 a.m.–12:45 p.m.

### SUBJECT

- US-Soviet Relations

### PARTICIPANTS

- Anastas I. Mikoyan, Deputy Premier of the USSR
- Mikhail A. Menshikov, Soviet Ambassador
- Oleg A. Troyanovski, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USSR
- Aleksandr Alekseevich Soldatov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USSR
- John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State
- Christian A. Herter, Under Secretary of State
- Livingston T. Merchant, Assistant Secretary
- Llewellyn E. Thompson, American Ambassador to Moscow
- Edward L. Freers, Director, Office of Eastern European Affairs

[Here follows discussion of unrelated matters; see [volume X, Part 1, Document 62.](#)]

The Secretary said if a different party came to power Mikoyan could be sure its viewpoint would be the same. The Secretary said he did [\[Page 271\]](#)not think it would change as long as present conditions prevailed. He recalled that at the time of the Berlin blockade and airlift, when Governor Dewey had just been nominated and was expected to win the forthcoming elections, the first action taken by the Governor was to associate Senator Vandenberg and Secretary Dulles with him in a statement of complete support for the Democratic administration's position on Berlin. The Minister would be under a great illusion if he felt that the present attitude concerning Berlin would change with a change in administration. Mikoyan declared that the Soviets openly expressed the view that they saw no difference between the Democratic and Republican Parties, but he thought the position required a change from a rigid to a more flexible attitude.

The Secretary pointed out that he had been under constant criticism from our Allies about inflexibility. Mikoyan said he had noted this and had noted that this criticism had had some influence on the Secretary. The Secretary said that this related perhaps to the formula for the reunification of Germany through free elections, approved by the Summit Conference in July 1955. <sup>1</sup> He wanted to say that we did not alter an agreed policy unilaterally. Mikoyan asked whether we did not, however, change policies by agreement.

The Secretary made the point that no policy was permanently unchangeable. We did not alter an agreed policy unilaterally but were always capable of changing it if it were reasonable to do so. He

wanted to make clear that no formula about Berlin would be acceptable if the Soviets had in mind attempting, by working through the East German regime, to impose its viewpoint. This could only lead to serious consequences.

Mikoyan said that what the Soviets had suggested was a six-month period for negotiating the problem. He wanted to make it very clear that the Soviet Union wanted to obtain no privileges in the situation—either for itself or the German Democratic Republic—nor did it want to deprive the United States of anything. It wanted West Berlin to be neutralized and demilitarized under guarantees by the Great Powers or, if necessary, by the UN. If we were agreeable, a permanent commission could be established to guarantee non-interference and freedom of access from all the sides. It welcomed other proposals that were based on non-interference. If nothing happened in six months, the Soviets would turn over their powers to the GDR—a state that has existed for seven years and on whose territory the lines of communication lie. The Soviet Union did not seek changes in the internal system of West Berlin. It had [\[Page 272\]](#)no illusions that it could be changed. The population could live under capitalism if it desired. Berlin ( **sic** could become a testing ground for cooperation between us instead of a hot-bed of aggression. It could be a meeting spot for countries to come together.

The Secretary stressed that we were prepared to negotiate but not only about Berlin and about a peace treaty, but about all the questions involved. By other questions he meant steps to bring about reunification. The Soviet peace treaty draft was a call to perpetuate the division of Germany. The German problem should be discussed without any diktat as to subjects. Interrelated with all this—Berlin, peace treaty and East Germany—was the problem of European security. This close link was recognized at the Geneva Summit meeting and the problem of European security should be discussed too.

The Secretary said the United States understood the Soviet preoccupations about Germany. If we could agree on reunification or a peace treaty, necessarily considered in the context of Europe as a whole, the Soviet Union could and should be given assurances against the rebirth of German militarism. The United States wanted no political or strategic advantage from the situation.

The Secretary said the German problem was becoming more difficult to solve and any repetition of the June 1953 outbreak which might take place would be occurring in much more dangerous circumstances. We recognized there were good and bad Germans and that the situation that evolved after World War I might evolve again.

Mikoyan said he saw no reflection of our sympathetic attitude toward the Soviet Union in our proposals. In fact, the Soviet leaders interpreted them in just the opposite way. They believed that lack of a peace treaty contributed to the perpetual division of Germany. Their draft did not assure reunification by itself but would bring conditions which would help rather than hinder reunification. Soviet objection to discussing reunification was not based on a position of diktat. Reunification was something to be brought about in the first instance by the two Germanies. They could be assisted but not replaced. The Federal Republic has refused to talk and has been supported in this by the United States. To put Adenauer's position crudely, he wanted to try to annex the GDR; liquidate its socialist regime; remain in NATO; continue atomic rearmament; and bring about conditions which would allow German revanchists to become active when they would be strong enough to do so. The GDR would not want to liquidate the socialist regime, but would resist. And, it was a Soviet ally in the Warsaw Pact. The Soviets believed that the aim in raising the problem as we raised it was to set our countries at loggerheads.

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Mikoyan said he had had many talks with Adenauer <sup>2</sup> who showed no haste for reunification since he realized his approach to it was unreal and he could not accept any other approach. He preferred to wait until West Germany became stronger and when with the help of the United States, he could speak in a different tone. Mikoyan asked whether the United States position was that it did, in fact, want German reunification through annexation of the GDR to West Germany and did want the latter to remain armed and in NATO while the GDR withdrew from the Warsaw Pact—and in that event was ready to reassure the Soviets by a type of pact which it now rejected.

The Secretary said that he had tried to indicate in his press conference <sup>3</sup> our complete philosophy about dealing with the German problem. We had to take into account the special position of countries lying next door to Germany and could not press any solution. But he wanted Mikoyan to have a chance to read carefully what the President and he had said. While he did not expect the Soviet Union to accept this to any extent now he would welcome the chance to expound fully on it. He repeated that any reunification of Germany should be accompanied by security arrangements, treaties, or the like, which would bring us together, along with Germany. He did not think West Germany objected to this and he referred to the treaty we had proposed in 1946.

Mikoyan replied that we had had much in common in the 1945–46 period and our proposals had been more dramatic then than now. He asked whether the Secretary had anything more specific or positive to say than what had been said at the press conference. The direction of the latter had been interesting but he did not know where it led. He did not like the President's statement that we believed in Adenauer and that what had taken place in 1914 could not be the basis of our present policy. <sup>4</sup>

Mikoyan said, reverting to an earlier topic, that the events of June 1953 could not occur again not because the West would not attempt to repeat them but because East Germany was now different. Errors in administration had been made but great changes had taken place in the past five years. Methods of administration and government had improved. There was one socialist party but other parties as well. Unofficially, he could say that they had had to take reparations from East Germany because they did not get them from West Germany. Thus the economic situation had been bad in 1953. The main thing was that the [\[Page 274\]](#)economic situation had improved. This was due to the fact that the Soviets had stopped taking reparations in 1953 and were now paying for all goods from East Germany and covering all occupation expenses. Adenauer had taken a more aggressive tone by holding the Bundestag meeting in West Berlin <sup>5</sup> because he saw the situation improving in East Germany and felt he might lose any possibility of influencing it. The SED decided at last year's party congress to match West German living standards by 1963. The socialist regime was strong in East Germany.

The Secretary referred to Mikoyan's remarks about alleged Western attempts to incite turmoil in East Germany. He said that Mikoyan was quite wrong about this. The United States not only did not desire such trouble, it would not like to see it happen. This would be dangerous for all of us.

Mikoyan said the danger lay in our position and that there might be elements in West Germany taking a different view from ours. These could bring about a deterioration in US-Soviet relations in spite of ourselves.

Mikoyan said that free elections were no cure-all. The Soviet Union was not against them in principle but they were not the means of uniting Germany at present. Two German States could not be eliminated by vote—an interim stage was necessary.

[Here follows discussion of unrelated matters; see [volume X, Part 1, Document 62.](#)]

1. Source: Department of State, Conference Files: Lot 64 D 560, CF 1183. Secret; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Freers. ↵
1. For documentation on the discussion of German reunification at the Geneva Summit Conference, July 18–23, 1955, see [Foreign Relations, 1955–1957, vol. V, pp. 361 ff.](#) ↵
2. Mikoyan made a state visit to Bonn April 23–26, 1958. ↵
3. For a transcript of Dulles' press conference on January 13, see Department of State **Bulletin** February 2, 1959, pp. 156–162. ↵
4. Not further identified. ↵
5. The Bundestag met in Berlin on October 1, 1958. ↵

# FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, BERLIN CRISIS, 1958–1959, VOLUME VIII

## 136. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>9</sup>

Washington, January 16, 1959, 4–5:30 p.m.

### SUBJECT

- U.S.-Soviet Relations

### PARTICIPANTS

- Anastas I. Mikoyan, Deputy Premier of the USSR
- Mikhail A. Menshikov, Soviet Ambassador
- Oleg A. Troyanovski, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USSR
- Aleksandr Alekseevich Soldatov, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, USSR
- John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State
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The Secretary said that as a final point he felt he should not leave the Minister under any doubt about the Berlin situation. The Western Powers would not acquiesce in any Soviet turnover of responsibilities in the Eastern zone to the GDR. We had no way of physically compelling the Soviet Union to discharge what was referred to in the agreement of 1949 as the occupation, but our side could not be compelled to recognize the GDR as a substitute for the USSR.

Mikoyan said that the Soviets had, first of all, proposed a free city. If the proposal were accepted, with any observations and amendments suggested by us and with guarantees, this question would not arise. If the proposal did not lead anywhere they would have to carry through with their announced turnover. The Secretary said that, in this case, we would have to follow through with our announced intentions.

Mikoyan said he hoped that all this would not arise. The complications in the situation, however, depended upon us. If we prejudged the situation in advance and if nothing had changed about Berlin, the Soviets would be compelled to fulfill their commitment. They wanted no aggravation of the situation. They suggested that we consider corrections and amendments to their proposals. Adenauer apparently complicated matters as far as we were concerned and perhaps he could consider such corrections and amendments as well.

The Secretary said that he had been authorized by the United Kingdom and France to state that the United States attitude expressed by him was fully supported by them.

Mikoyan said this could all be reconsidered, but not here and now. He thought that the Secretary's reference to the authorization of our Allies might have stemmed from some apprehension on the Secretary's part that he had been leading them forward and that they had been hanging on his coattails.

1. Source: Department of State, Conference Files: Lot 64 D 560, CF 1183. Secret; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Freers. ↩



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