

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

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

Washington, January 17, 1959, 9 a.m.

### SUBJECT

- Mikoyan's Call on the President

### PARTICIPANTS

- The President
- The Secretary of State
- Livingston T. Merchant, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
- Llewellyn E. Thompson, American Ambassador to the Soviet Union
- First Deputy Prime Minister Mikoyan
- Ambassador Menshikov
- Mr. Troyanovski

The President said he had heard from the Secretary of State about his conversation with Mr. Mikoyan and could say that the Secretary of State had reflected accurately the views of the United States Government concerning Berlin, the Far East and other matters covered. It was understood by both sides that these were conversations and not negotiations. The purpose was for each to explore the mind of the other to see if it were possible to find a better basis for understanding. If these had been negotiations they would have had to have been on a more formal basis with experts present (the Secretary of State added "and allies", to which the President agreed). The President recalled his previous visit to Moscow in 1945 and said that he thought that was the only time he had met Mr. Mikoyan before. He also recalled meeting Mr. Khrushchev in Geneva. The conversations there had been sterile so far as any material advance was concerned but they had nevertheless been useful. The President was convinced that the Soviet people, as the people of the United States, wanted peace and to remove the anxieties that existed on both sides. It was the function of governments and statesmen to find programs that could be agreed upon and a path which could be followed by both countries that could lead to better feeling between our peoples. It was not our purpose to condemn communism or the Russian people. That would be wrong and the Russian people should have whatever government they wanted, but there was no reason why we could not find a path which could lead to better relations between us. In [\[Page 277\]](#)all aspects in our foreign policy where we have a firm position such as that concerning Berlin, we try nevertheless to be conciliatory and we seek to find a way for our two peoples to raise their standards of living and find a better life.

Mikoyan said he had instructions from Khrushchev to convey his cordial greetings and his wishes for the good health of the President. He had also asked him to say that, knowing the President as he did, he hoped the President would make use of his second term to improve relations between the two countries. It was necessary to make a start and while the first agreement might not be important it was possible for it to snowball and lead to a great improvement. He said Khrushchev had remarked that if he had been permitted to vote in the United States he would have voted for the President. He had had prolonged talks in the United States and he thought the Secretary of State could confirm that they had been useful. The Secretary of State had made several statements that had been gratifying to him. He had said that it was not the policy of the United States to act against the Soviet Union and that the United States had no desire for violent action with respect to East Germany. The question of European security had also been discussed. What the President had just said was gratifying and he hoped it would find reflection in the practical steps to be taken. Although the Secretary of State had made some specific remarks about atomic tests cessation and about surprise attack, Mikoyan did not feel that on some other matters any practical steps were contemplated. He thought that the conclusion of the German peace treaty would have a great importance and that they could find common ground on this matter. There were forces however which opposed this and in this connection he drew attention to Chancellor Adenauer's statement of January 12. <sup>1</sup> Adenauer apparently desired to influence the U.S. position on the question of a peace treaty by hastily expressing his own view. It seems strange that the representative of the defeated country should be the first to come out against a possible peace treaty. Perhaps Adenauer believes that by delaying a peace treaty he might become stronger, exploit the differences between us and base his position upon force. He was ignoring the existence of a second German state and was conducting subversive activities in an attempt to overthrow it. If such a policy were followed, the German Democratic Republic might attempt to bring about changes in the Federal German Republic. Such a line of policy was fraught with danger. Soviet Union thought that if a peace treaty were concluded, perhaps with the two German states, this might open up the road for reunification. The U.S. Secretary [Page 278] of State kept his eye on what Adenauer thought but so far as a peace treaty was concerned there was also Great Britain and France. The Soviets attach great importance to the peace treaty question. The peace treaty could of course not settle the question of reunification but it could prepare the ground. The Soviets would be persistent in pressing for a peace treaty. If the United States supported Adenauer's position on this matter, then the Soviet Union and the other Eastern European countries would have to find their own independent way to a solution of that question. He hoped the peace treaty would serve to bring the Soviet Union and the United States together. We were both faced with many problems nowadays and we should try to solve some of them. He realized that these were not negotiations and there was some advantage in the fact that they were merely conversations since it was possible to speak more frankly. He wished to express the hope that the President and the U.S. Government would examine the outstanding points between us and find a way to resolve them. He wished to assure the President that all of their steps in foreign affairs were designed to consolidate peace and to prevent war although some of the steps they had taken had been described as leading to new aggravations.

[Here follows discussion of unrelated matters; see [volume X, Part 1, Document 64.](#)]

Mr. Mikoyan observed that the President had covered many subjects and he had been much pleased with what the President had said. With regard to Germany the Soviet Union had no desire to seek revenge or to place Germany in a subjugated position. The Soviet Union had

good relations with East Germany and would like to have good relations with the Germans in West Germany. About a year ago he had gone to Bonn and had talked with Adenauer as well as with German business leaders and others, and he thought the Germans did want peace because they know what a new war would mean. There were however groups in West Germany that were revenge-minded and wished to bring about changes by forceful means. Although he did not know him well it seemed that Mr. Strauss was like a sponge who concentrated in himself these feelings. Chancellor Adenauer knew how to talk and they had had an interesting conversation in which Adenauer had made some reassuring statements. However, the Chancellor was not constant in his policies. Perhaps these zigzags were deliberate. As an example he had asked Adenauer if he considered it right that West Germany did not recognize Poland and Czechoslovakia. Adenauer had replied that he was personally favorable to the establishment of relations but thought that the Soviet Union would have objections. When Mikoyan had said the Soviet Union thought the contrary, Adenauer said he would establish relations. It is true that Brentano was present and had said nothing in assent to this position. Nothing however had been done despite Adenauer's [\[Page 279\]](#) remark and two months later he made inadmissible statements concerning Germany's eastern frontiers, stating that they should be changed although it is true that he said only peaceful methods should be used. Adenauer knows that Poland and Czechoslovakia would not give up territory. Statements of this kind encourage those in Western Germany who seek revenge. The Soviet Union does however desire to improve its relations with West Germany. From the information at the disposal of the Soviet Union the limitations that had been established for West Germany had been practically brought to nought and they might be done away with altogether. It appeared that they were being given rockets. Mikoyan said that he had raised the question of the law passed by the German Bundestag concerning missiles and that Adenauer had tried to reassure him that this was only a theoretical step and had no practical significance. Recently Strauss had spoken of introducing these arms in Germany more quickly. Despite reassurances, the Soviet Union had misgivings that Germany was getting more arms than were needed for defense purposes. The Soviet Union had no objection to German possession of defensive armaments.

With regard to elections there was a time back in 1946 when the United States and Soviet positions were close on such questions as elections, demilitarization, etc. He had no intention in engaging in polemics but the fact remains that to date there were two German states with practically no relations between them and West Germany did not even want to talk. Even armies at war found means to talk to each other through third parties. Under these conditions how could free elections settle the problem. The time might come when free elections would be possible but in the present situation they were no cure-all. Therefore the Soviet Union thought that intermediate steps and forms should be evolved. A coalition government should be formed and no matter how weak it was such a situation would be better than the present total lack of relations. A peace treaty, far from preventing the reunification of Germany, would assist in achieving this goal.

[Here follows discussion of an unrelated matter; see [volume X, Part 1, Document 64.](#)]

Mikoyan pointed out that the President had indicated that if Germany had no military obligations it would have an economic advantage. There was a way to avoid this. They could revert to the old position and ask for some reparations from Germany and thus deprive her of any advantage. There were also other ways of preventing danger.

The President intervened to say that he had said this would be an opportunity for the Germans.

Mikoyan continued that arrangements could be made for the Germans to help the underdeveloped countries.

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[Here follows discussion of an unrelated matter; see [volume X, Part 1, Document 64.](#)]

The President said Mikoyan was familiar with our form of Government and if Congress exaggerated our need for arms as he sometimes thought they tended to do, it was because the Congress represented the sum of the fears of our people. It was clear that we had different views on Germany and Berlin. If those problems were difficult to resolve now let us leave them aside and tackle them later when they could be resolved. We now center our attention on this problem because it is the most important and difficult. The President said that our people have definite views and debate them sharply but in a few things they are closely united and there should be no doubt in His Excellency's mind about our unity on the question of Berlin and Germany. The President therefore suggested we tackle other problems and perhaps by solving them we could develop a better climate and more mutual trust.

Mikoyan suggested we should end the cold war. This was the reason for the military appropriations by the Congress and the Soviet Union did not consider that it was to blame for the cold war. There was no basis for the suspicion that they would commit aggression. As for Berlin there had been no exchange of views. In the time before us he hoped that we would advance some views instead of taking a purely negative line. He realized the desire to seek a settlement of easier problems. Some such problems had been resolved but that did not seem to help in improving our relations.

The President said that in several meetings between the Soviet Union and the West during and at the end of the war we had undertaken certain responsibilities. He had been there at that time and his own forces had withdrawn to the agreed line. Part of this agreement was that Berlin would be handled as it is today and he did not think it fair to call it negative when we insisted upon discharging our responsibilities there.

Mikoyan said that as far as the earlier part was concerned he had no complaints. However the occupation had been terminated in East and in West Germany. Only Berlin had occupation forces. They did not ask that Berlin be turned over to East Germany or that Soviet troops replace ours. After such a long period after the war the occupation should be ended. Berlin should be demilitarized and turned into a free city with no loss or gain on either side. He hoped the President would consider the matter again and that a settlement could be found which would involve no risk.

Secretary Dulles said one of the difficulties is that it is believed in Germany and elsewhere that the government in East Germany was not a Government of Germans but one that was wholly imposed upon them and hated by the Germans. It was a form of masked occupation as long as the government was not responsive to the will of the people. The [\[Page 281\]](#)United States had proposed free elections but on that question the Soviet Union was persistently negative.

Mikoyan said that this view was spread from abroad and did not correspond to the facts. The Government of East Germany was supported by Socialists, Liberals and Social Democrats in East Germany. The people in the East German Government did not spring to power by

accident. They were people who are well known there. Many personalities in the government had been in the Bundestag in the time of the Kaiser. One, Grotewohl, was a Social Democrat leader and had never been a Communist. The head of the Parliament, Dikmann, had never been a Communist but was once Secretary to Stresemann. If one compared the composition of the governments in East and West Germany it would be found that the government in East Germany was more authoritative. Recently elections had been held by secret ballot in East Germany and the people overwhelmingly supported the government. It should be easy to get true information about the situation there. Neither the Soviet Government nor Soviet forces interfered in East Germany. The East Germans were allies just as we had relations with Adenauer. We were allied to one part of Germany and the Soviet Union to the other. This was a bad situation and it would be better if the Soviet Union and the United States were allied.

Mikoyan hoped that this exchange of views had been useful. He would report to his Government and would take great pleasure in conveying the President's greetings to Khrushchev.

The President said he was glad Mikoyan had taken the trouble to come to the United States.

Mikoyan expressed his thanks for the help he had had from the authorities in this country and the reception he had received from the people and the business world. The President said we would be glad to compete in hospitality.

1. Source: Department of State, Conference Files: Lot 64 D 560, CF 1183. Secret; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Thompson and approved by the White House on January 26. The meeting was held at the White House. The time and location of the meeting are from Dulles' Appointment Book. (Princeton University Library, Dulles Papers) Prior to this conversation Dulles gave the President a half-hour briefing on the substance of his talks with Mikoyan on January 5 and 16. (Eisenhower Library, President's Appointment Book)↩
1. At a press conference following a meeting of the CDU Parliamentary Party Group in Bonn on January 12, Adenauer had stated that the proposed Soviet draft German peace treaty was unacceptable. ↩

# FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1958–1960, VOLUME X, PART 1, EASTERN EUROPE REGION; SOVIET UNION; CYPRUS

## 64. Memorandum of Conversation<sup>o</sup>

Washington, January 17, 1959, 9 a.m.

### SUBJECT

- Mikoyan's Call on the President

### PARTICIPANTS

- The President
- The Secretary of State
- Livingston T. Merchant, Assistant Secretary for European Affairs
- Llewellyn E. Thompson, American Ambassador to the Soviet Union
- First Deputy Prime Minister Mikoyan
- Ambassador Menshikov
- Mr. Troyanovski

[Here follow introductory remarks and discussion on Berlin and Germany printed in [volume VIII, Document 137.](#)]

After a prompting by Ambassador Menshikov, Mikoyan referred to the President's reply last summer to Khrushchev's letter on trade. <sup>1</sup> This reply had produced a favorable impression but there had been no subsequent progress in this field. The Secretary of State had suggested that he meet with Under Secretary Dillon and he had therefore not discussed this matter with the Secretary of State. The President in his letter had pointed out that even now there was the possibility of developing trade but one difficulty was that the commercial treaty between the Soviet Union and the United States had been denounced. The Congress had also passed legislation directed against the Soviet Union. <sup>2</sup> They had [\[Page 238\]](#)no desire to buy arms or strategic materials and in fact could sell us some.

[Here follows a brief paragraph crossed out on the source text, which reads: "The President said he had no money. Mikoyan retorted that he had so much he didn't know what to do with it and therefore spent it on arms."]

The President said that Mr. Dillon was a very reasonable and well informed man and he was sure that Mr. Mikoyan's conversation with him would be valuable and interesting. He asked Mr. Mikoyan to carry back to Mr. Khrushchev his thanks for the cordial greeting and say that he reciprocated the sentiments he had expressed for his health and happiness. He was prepared to use the final part of his term to promote a better relationship and he was convinced that this could be brought about. Mr. Mikoyan had spoken of making a beginning.

The President had hoped that this beginning had been realized when the Austrian peace treaty was signed and at that time he had expressed the hope that it would be possible to have talks with the Soviet leaders. This had been done at the Geneva conference. Two things had come up there that had aroused great interest and hope. The first was the possibility that Germany could be reunited in such a way that Germany would not become a danger. The agreement had been that this would be done peacefully and by popular elections. The President did not agree that we were too much influenced by any individual in our efforts to resolve these problems. We did not know of any other way of doing this except by free elections. He pointed out that free elections were in our tradition. If we tried to establish an imposed peace we would have to keep observers and maintain forces in order to make Germany observe the conditions imposed and we knew of no practical way other than free elections. We do not desire that there be another militarized Germany. We had had four experiences of German militarism and wanted no more. In our view, Germany also wanted no militarism. In the associations in which West Germany had become a member, provisions in regard to German armaments had been made and had been observed. It was fair to say that we would share the Soviets' anxieties if Germany got in a position to start trouble but the Germans were a strong, virile people and if oppressed could react in a way which we would consider undesirable. It was also important to both of us to remember that if the Germans did not have to bear the cost of arms they would have an advantage in economic competition. We wanted a peaceful Germany united in such a way that neither the Soviet Union nor the United States could have any apprehension about it.

Another point which had come up in the Geneva talks had been the increased contacts, visits, exchanges of literature, etc. The President had sent a letter to Mr. Khrushchev, or perhaps it was to Mr. Bulganin, [\[Page 239\]](#)saying that we would welcome visits here of high Soviet officials<sup>3</sup> and he would like to feel that Mr. Mikoyan's visit here was a result of that invitation. The idea of these exchanges had not been implemented in the way it should. We had made arrangements for the exchange of twenty or thirty students but these exchanges should be in the hundreds if we could find enough who had the requisite knowledge of the language. The Russian language appeared to be harder for us than our language was for the Russian people.

The President said he would not speak about trade as Mr. Mikoyan would talk with Mr. Dillon on this but he thought this was an area in which we could seek better relations. We both put too much of our work and talent into arms. In this field we must so act that we can make progress but with confidence in what we are doing. The President said that he wished to conclude as he had started by saying he was persuaded the peoples of both countries wanted peace, and opportunity to improve their cultural level and to raise their standard of living. This basic truth should guide us even when we disagree on some specific problem. He wished to thank Mr. Mikoyan for having come to visit us and if he had encountered bad manners anywhere on his trip he wished him to know that this did not express the attitude of the United States.

[Here follows discussion of Berlin and Germany printed in [volume VIII, Document 137.](#)]

Mikoyan said that the President had spoken of military expenditure and he could express full agreement with his remarks. Some of the American cabinet officers and particularly the Minister of Defense had said that the Soviet Union should reduce its arms and expenditures.<sup>4</sup> Mikoyan said that he had replied that this was what they wanted to do but if



they did it unilaterally they were afraid the United States would continue to develop its position of strength.

The President interjected that this was what we both always said.

Mikoyan said that then we should both do it together. He pointed out that in the past three years the Soviets had made no increase in their military expenditures whereas the United States expenditures had been very high and Congress on occasion even increased the proposals made by the President which were already at a very high level.

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[Here follows discussion of Germany printed in [volume VIII, Document 137.](#)]

Mikoyan said that he had been pleased when the President spoke about developing contacts. Some practical steps in this field had been taken and neither side had reason to be disappointed as reciprocity had been observed and both sides had been correct. With respect to students we should exchange not 100 but several hundred. It was true that the Soviet Union preferred to start with a smaller number and he could say frankly why they were so cautious. The Soviet Union was suspicious of the United States intelligence service although it was headed by a very pleasant man, the brother of the Secretary of State, whom he had met last evening. The Soviet Government suspected, although they might be wrong, that this exchange would be used for other purposes than study. If they were real students this was all right but if they were agents it is another matter.

The President interrupted to say that he would be very surprised if it were possible to take an 18 year old student and make an intelligence agent out of him.

Mikoyan said the outcome would depend upon the behavior of the students.

The President said we must develop a situation of confidence so that there would be no need for this feeling of secrecy.

Mikoyan said that Mr. Johnston had arranged an exchange of films and this was important because pictures influence people.

Secretary Dulles observed that certain films were not always helpful, such as crime pictures. Mikoyan replied that they did not make such films and would not take them from us. He said the Soviet films which they were supplying us contained virtually no propaganda and he hoped the President would see them.

[Here follow discussion of Berlin and Germany and concluding remarks printed in [volume VIII, Document 137.](#)]

1. Source: Eisenhower Library, Whitman File, International File. Secret; Limit Distribution. Drafted by Thompson. The meeting was held at the White House. Attached to the source text are three memoranda. One from Dulles to the President, January 15, indicates that he would have an oral report for the President on the morning of January 17 concerning his talks with Mikoyan on January 16 and enclosing a briefing paper with suggested talking points for the President's conversation with Mikoyan. In the second memorandum to the President, January 16, Dulles made additional points the President might wish to raise with Mikoyan. The third memorandum from Dulles to the President, January 16, summarized Dulles' conversation with Mikoyan on the morning of January 16. From 8:27 to 8:59 a.m. on January 17, the President met



with Dulles, Merchant, Thompson, and Hagerty at which time Dulles presumably briefed the President orally on his meetings with Mikoyan. ( *ibid*, President's Appointment Book) [↩](#)

1. For texts of Khrushchev's letter to Eisenhower, June 2, 1958, and Eisenhower's reply, July 14, 1958, on expansion of U.S.-Soviet trade, see Department of State *Bulletin* August 4, 1958, pp. 200–202. [↩](#)
2. Reference is apparently to the commercial agreement between the Soviet Union and the United States of August 4, 1937. (11 Bevans 1271) This agreement was denounced in the Trade Agreements Extension Act of 1951. (65 Stat. 72) Section 5 of that act required the President to deny the benefits of trade agreement concessions to imports from the Soviet Union and its satellites. [↩](#)
3. For text of Eisenhower's letter to Bulganin, February 15, 1958, proposing, among other things, visits by prominent Soviet citizens to the United States, see Department of State *Bulletin* March 10, 1958, pp. 373–376. [↩](#)
4. In his January 15 memorandum to the President, attached to the source text, Dulles mentioned that following his meetings with Mikoyan on January 16, he, Vice President Nixon, and other Cabinet members would have dinner with Mikoyan. It may be that the comments of Secretary of Defense McElroy and other Cabinet officials on armaments were made during this dinner. [↩](#)



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