

Aide-mémoire from Nikita Khrushchev to John F. Kennedy (Vienna, 4 June 1961)

Caption: During meetings with the US President John F. Kennedy held in Vienna on 3 and 4 June 1961, Nikita Khrushchev, First Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, reiterates his proposals for the conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany and for West Berlin to be granted the status of a free city.

Source: Berlin (1944-1962), Dossier de l'affaire de Berlin, préparé par A. Molter, rapporteur. Paris: Assemblée de l'Union de l'Europe occidentale, 1962. 68 p. p. 29-32.

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Aide-Mémoire handed by Mr. Khrushchev to President Kennedy in Vienna

4th June 1961

1. The peace settlement with Germany, dragged out for many years, has largely predetermined the dangerous development of events in Europe in the postwar period. Very important allied decisions on rooting out militarism in Germany, which the governments of the United States and the USSR regarded at the time as a “guarantee of lasting peace”, were implemented only in part and are now virtually not observed on the greater part of German territory. Of the governments of the two German States that have taken shape since the war, only the Government of the German Democratic Republic recognises these agreements and adheres to them. The Government of the Federal Republic of Germany openly expresses its negative attitude to them, fosters sabre-rattling militarism and comes out in favour of revision of the German frontiers, revision of the results of the second world war. It seeks to build up a strong military base for its aggressive plans, to foster a dangerous hotbed of conflicts on German soil and to set at loggerheads the former allies in the anti-nazi coalition.

The western powers permitted the Federal Republic of Germany to set about stockpiling weapons and building up an army obviously exceeding defence requirements. Other dangerous steps by the NATO powers were their permission for the Federal Republic of Germany to build warships with a displacement of up to 6,000 tons, and also to use British, French and Italian territory for military bases of the Federal Republic of Germany.

2. The Soviet Government sincerely strives for the elimination of the causes engendering tension between the USSR and the United States and for a change-over to constructive friendly cooperation. The conclusion of a German peace treaty would bring both countries much closer to this aim. The USSR and the United States fought shoulder to shoulder against nazi Germany. It is their common duty to conclude a German peace treaty and thus create a firm guarantee that forces which could plunge the world into another still more devastating war will never rise on German soil. If the Soviet Union's desire to strengthen peace and to prevent the unleashing of another world war in Europe does not differ from the intentions of the United States Government, it will not be difficult to reach agreement.

3. Proceeding on the basis of a realistic assessment of the situation, the Soviet Government advocates the immediate conclusion of a peace treaty with Germany. The question of a peace treaty is a question of the national security of the USSR and many other States. It is no longer possible to leave the situation in Germany without changes. All conditions for the conclusion of a peace treaty have long since matured and such a treaty must be concluded. The essence of the matter is by whom and how it will be concluded and whether there will be unnecessary delays involved.

4. The Soviet Government does not aim at prejudicing the interests of the United States or other powers in Europe. It does not propose any changes in Germany or in West Berlin which would benefit only one State or one group of States. The USSR considers it necessary for the sake of strengthening peace to record the situation that took shape in Europe after the war, to formulate and consolidate *de jure* the immutability of the existing German frontiers and to normalise the situation in West Berlin on the basis of reasonable consideration for the interests of all sides.

For the sake of reaching agreement on a peace treaty the Soviet Union does not insist on the immediate withdrawal of the Federal Republic of Germany from NATO. After the conclusion of a peace treaty both German States could for a certain period remain members of those military groupings to which they now belong.

The Soviet proposal does not tie up the conclusion of the peace treaty with recognition of the German Democratic Republic or the Federal Republic of Germany by all parties to this treaty. To recognise or not to recognise this or that State is a matter for each government.

If the United States is not ready to sign a single peace treaty with both German States, a peace settlement

could be effected on the basis of two treaties. In this case the member States of the anti-nazi coalition would sign a peace treaty with both or with one German State at their discretion. These treaties need not have identical texts but they must contain the same provisions on the major questions of a peace settlement.

5. The conclusion of a German peace treaty would also solve the problem of normalising the situation in West Berlin. West Berlin, deprived of a firm international status, is now a place where Bonn's revenge-seeking elements constantly maintain extreme tension and stage all kinds of provocations very dangerous to the cause of peace. We must prevent a development under which the strengthening of West German militarism might lead to irreparable consequences due to the unsettled situation in West Berlin.

At present the Soviet Government sees no better solution to the problem of West Berlin than its conversion into a demilitarised free city. The implementation of the proposal for a free city would normalise the situation in West Berlin, taking due account of the interests of all sides. The occupation régime preserved there has long since outlived its day; it has lost any connection with the aims for the sake of which it was created, and with the allied agreements on Germany on the basis of which it has existed. The occupation rights, of course, would discontinue with the conclusion of a German peace treaty, no matter whether it were signed with both German States or only with the German Democratic Republic, inside whose territory West Berlin lies.

The Soviet Government advocates that the free city of West Berlin should freely effect its communications with the outside world and that its domestic system should be determined by the free expression of the will of its population. Of course, the United States, like all other countries, would have every opportunity to maintain and develop its relations with the free city. In general, West Berlin, as the Soviet Government sees it, must be strictly neutral. It must not be tolerated, of course, that West Berlin should be further used as a base for provocative hostile activity against the USSR, the German Democratic Republic or any other State and continue to remain a dangerous centre of tension and international conflicts.

The USSR proposes that the most reliable guarantees should be established against intervention in the affairs of the free city by any State. As a guarantor of the free city, token contingents of troops of the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union could be stationed in West Berlin. Nor would the USSR object to the stationing in West Berlin of troops of neutral countries under United Nations auspices for the same purpose. The status of the free city could be appropriately registered at the United Nations and sealed with the authority of that international organisation. The Soviet side agrees to discuss any other measures which could guarantee the freedom and independence of West Berlin as a free demilitarised city.

The West Berlin settlement must, of course, take into consideration in every way the necessity for respect for, and strict observance of, the sovereign rights of the German Democratic Republic, which is known to have expressed its readiness to adhere to an appropriate agreement and to respect it.

6. The Soviet Government proposes that a peace conference be called already at the present time without any delay, a German treaty concluded and the question of West Berlin as a free city settled on this basis. If, for one reason or another, the governments of the United States and other western powers are at present not yet ready for this, an interim solution could be adopted for a definite period.

The four powers will urge the German States to agree in any way acceptable to them on the questions pertaining to a peace settlement with Germany and reunification. The four powers will declare in advance that they will recognise any agreement which the Germans may reach.

In the event of a positive outcome to the talks between the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany, a single peace treaty would then be agreed and signed. If the German States are not able to agree on the aforementioned questions, measures will be taken for the conclusion of a peace treaty with both German States or with one of them at the discretion of the countries concerned.

In order not to drag out the peace settlement it is necessary to establish deadlines within which the Germans must explore the possibilities of agreements on questions falling within their internal competence. The

Soviet Government regards a period not exceeding six months as adequate for such talks. This period is fully adequate for contact between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Democratic Republic of Germany and for talks between them, since in the 16 years since the war understanding has matured of the necessity for liquidating the remnants of the second world war in Europe.

7. The Soviet Government is ready to examine any constructive proposals by the United States Government on a German peace treaty and the normalisation of the situation in West Berlin. The Soviet Government will show the maximum of goodwill in order to solve the problem of a German peace treaty by mutual agreement between the USSR, the United States and other States concerned. The signing of a German peace treaty by all parties to the anti-nazi coalition and a settlement on this basis of the question of the neutral status of West Berlin would create the best conditions for confidence between States and the solution of such major international problems as disarmament and others. If the United States does not show an understanding of the necessity for concluding a peace treaty, we shall regret this, since we would have to sign a peace treaty, which it would be impossible and dangerous to delay further, not with all States, but only with those that want to sign it.

The peace treaty will specifically record the status of West Berlin as a free city, and the Soviet Union, like the other parties to the treaty, will, of course, strictly observe it and measures will also be taken to see to it that this status is also respected by the other countries. At the same time this will also mean the liquidation of the occupation régime in West Berlin with all the consequences arising from this. In particular, the questions of using land, water and air communications across the territory of the German Democratic Republic will have to be settled not otherwise than through appropriate agreements with the German Democratic Republic. This is only natural, since control over such communications is an inalienable right of any sovereign State.

8. The conclusion of the German treaty will be a major step towards a final postwar settlement in Europe which the Soviet Union has invariably been striving for.