

Statement by Christian A. Herter on the status of Berlin (Geneva, 5 June 1959)

Caption: On 5 June 1959, at the Four-Power Conference in Geneva, the US Secretary of State, Christian A. Herter, criticises Moscow's position on the settling of the question regarding the status of the City of Berlin and reaffirms the United States' support for the citizens of West Berlin.

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Statement by Secretary of State Herter regarding Berlin (Geneva, 5 June 1959)

My purpose today is to indicate to the conference my Government's view on the Berlin issue, after having taken into account the discussions we have had during the past weeks. I shall try to explain the objections we have to the Soviet Union's plan to impose a new status on West Berlin prior to reunification of Germany. I shall try to explain the reasons why we think that the Berlin proposal contained in the Western peace plan is a reasonable solution for the interim period prior to the reunification of Germany.

Before making these points, however, I would like to suggest that, in dealing with the great political issues that concern us here, there may be a tendency to overlook the fact that the lives and liberties of more than 2 million persons are at stake in our deliberations.

To keep a good sense of proportion on this score let us not forget that the population of West Berlin is greater than the population of almost 20 percent of the member nations of the United Nations. And it is estimated that the value of the goods and services produced in West Berlin last year exceeded the gross national product of more than half of the members of the United Nations.

Defects in Soviet Plan for West Berlin

The Foreign Minister of the Soviet Union has said that by the term "the Berlin problem" he meant "primarily the ending of the occupation in West Berlin." It seems that this definition minimizes the real dimensions of the Berlin problem. For us, the Berlin problem means maintenance of freedom for more than 2 million human beings who at the end of the war with the agreement of the Soviet Government came under the occupation authority of the three Western Powers.

Although our rights in Berlin stem from the war, our obligations arise from the trusteeship which we have undertaken to exercise for the people of Berlin until the reunification of their country removes this need for our protection. The past 14 years have shown that West Berlin is encircled by hostile forces and that its independence and well-being are dependent upon the presence of the three Western Powers in the city and in the maintenance of the political and economic links between Berlin and the West.

I think that there is another fundamental difference between the Soviet Union and ourselves on this matter of Berlin. This difference derives from our different attitude toward the reunification of Germany. Although talking about the ideal of German unity and recognizing that German unification is the real key to the Berlin problem, the Soviet Union has openly adopted a two-Germany policy, if not a three-Germany policy. Now how does West Berlin fit into this policy of the permanent partition of Germany? The Soviet Foreign Minister gave us the answer on May 30 in one of the most revealing statements made during the many plenary sessions we have held. I should like to quote from RM/Doc/29 dated May 30, and I am quoting the Soviet Foreign Minister:

"If we are to speak frankly, the Soviet Government considers the creation of a free city far from being an ideal solution of the West Berlin question. The most equitable approach to this question would be, of course, the extension to West Berlin of the full sovereignty of the German Democratic Republic. I think that the German Democratic Republic, whose capital the division of the city continues to mutilate, could with the fullest justification demand such a solution of the question."

I am grateful to Mr. Gromyko for his willingness to speak so frankly. We thus have in his own words a clear and valuable statement of the ultimate objective of the Soviet Union regarding West Berlin.

Under this policy the Soviet Union asserts that it would be most acceptable for West Berlin to be annexed to the so-called "German Democratic Republic." Mr. Gromyko has made no bones about this. This is his preferred solution to the Berlin question. It is no wonder then that the Western Powers, who see in the

reunification of Germany the only real solution to the Berlin issue, are having difficulty with the Soviet interim plan for West Berlin.

It may be useful to look at this admittedly “second preference” Soviet plan a little more closely.

Since the prime Soviet purpose is to remove the Allied presence from West Berlin, it is not surprising that the key part of the plan is the termination of Western occupation rights. Even if, as is clearly not the case, the rest of the plan were acceptable to us, this point alone would vitiate the entire scheme.

During the course of our talks about Berlin this conference has clarified at least one important matter. The Western Powers’ presence and their access to Berlin are a matter of right: They are not at the sufferance of any other authority, legitimate or otherwise. On June 2nd Mr. Gromyko told us:

“The representatives of the Western Powers interpret not infrequently the proposal of the Soviet Government concerning the granting of the status of a free city to West Berlin as if the Soviet Union disregards the rights of the U.S., U.K., and France, which arise from capitulation of Hitlerite Germany, but this is an inaccurate interpretation. We do not consider that the troops of the U.S., the U.K., and France have turned up in Berlin by some sort of illegal means. ...

This is a constructive if somewhat tardy recognition by the U.S.S.R. of our established and legitimate rights, although historical facts support this juridical conclusion and exclude any other.

The second salient defect in the Soviet plan is that it would in effect compel the Western Powers to grant a measure of recognition to the so-called German Democratic Republic. No non-Communist nation has recognized this instrument of the Soviet Union as an independent nation. I can assure you that we have no intention of recognizing the so-called German Democratic Republic as the price of a solution to the Berlin problem.

I should point out one other serious defect in the Soviet plan. Although purporting to terminate the occupation, it would supplant the present regime by imposing in a real occupation spirit a new political status on the people of West Berlin. The U.S.S.R. in its note of November 27, 1958, formally acknowledged that West Berlin must be granted the right to whatever way of life it wishes for itself, with one qualification — “when the foreign occupation is ended.” I cannot find any hint or suggestion in the Soviet plan that, even though the “foreign occupation” would be ended under the Soviet plan, the people of West Berlin would have any real voice in whether or not the proposed new political status should come into existence.

As a matter of fact, the West Berliners have by an overwhelming vote endorsed their present way of life — and by the same vote they have in effect rejected the Soviet scheme. They are in a first-rate position to judge for themselves the comparative merits of a free system and a Communist system.

The U.S.S.R. has vigorously urged that we impose this new unwanted status on West Berliners under the label of a “free city.” Surely by this time the U.S.S.R. should have had enough experience with governments not based upon the consent of the governed! This indeed is a curious proposal coming from the Soviet Foreign Minister, who at the same time complains that the West Berliners are now being deprived by the Western Powers of rights contained in the charter of the United Nations.

One final defect in the Soviet plan should be noted. In addition to the Western military presence West Berlin owes its viability to its political, economic, and social ties with the Federal Republic of Germany. The entire thrust of the Soviet plan for West Berlin cuts into these ties and is clearly intended to establish a situation which will be but a “way station” on the road to the preferred Soviet solution — that of annexation of West Berlin by the Communist-controlled authority in East Germany.

It seems to us that the term “free city” is a complete misnomer. There would be no freedom in this new

status for the West Berliners since the new status would not cover a city but only a truncated two-thirds of a city.

The Soviet second-preference proposal contains nothing or practically nothing different from the November 1958 Soviet proposal for changing the regime in West Berlin (as modified subsequently by Mr. Khrushchev). In this proposal the Soviet Union does not appear to make any effort at all to meet the view of the Western Powers with respect to the essentiality of a clear maintenance of present Western rights in Berlin. It cannot form a basis for any solution of the Berlin issue raised by the U.S.S.R.

The Western Peace Plan

In rejecting the U.S.S.R.'s second-preference "free city" proposal the Western Powers do not maintain that the present situation is ideal. We do not say that it cannot be improved in some respects.

In our concentration on Berlin we perhaps have tended to overlook the other important aspects of the Western peace plan. It would be an illusion, and a dangerous one at that, to believe that any long-range Berlin solution can be reached in the face of a complete impasse on the central problem making for continuing European insecurity — that of a divided Germany.

The heart of the Western peace plan lies in its comprehensive proposal for the gradual reunification of Germany. The plan makes provision as well for European security and concomitant arms-control moves — and for an interim Berlin solution. But the continued dangerous division of Germany places great obstacles in the way of real progress on European security, arms control, and Berlin. The unification of Germany is still our main task. We are confident that the solution proposed in the Western peace plan will stand the test of history and will be seen to offer reasonable answers to the great problems raised by the continuing division of Germany.

It seems clear from the worldwide appreciation which the Western peace plan has received that the Soviets' claim that it is but a device to generate disagreement has met the reception it deserved.

And so let us continue to look at these matters in parallel. In trying to improve the Berlin situation for the interim we must not do anything to put off the day when Germany is reunified. And in our striving for German unity we must not prejudice the position of West Berlin.

What is the interim Berlin proposal contained in the Western peace plan? It would, in advance of final reunification of Germany, permit the unification of the separated parts of Berlin. Free elections would be held throughout the city. The Four Powers would guarantee the freedom of the city and access thereto pending the reunification of Germany. These happy developments would take place in the very first phase of the Western peace plan. Their accomplishment would be a good harbinger of that greater unity which under our plan would follow shortly thereafter for all of Germany.

The U.S.S.R. gave short shrift to the whole Western peace plan as well as its all-Berlin proposal. On May 31st we read in the press that Mr. Khrushchev said at Tirana in Albania:

"The seven-point plan tabled by Mr. Herter does not contain a single element for negotiation. These proposals are not based on a desire to find a correct solution with a view to achieving that relaxation of international tension which all the peoples so anxiously await."

Foreign Minister Gromyko said in a plenary session of this conference, June 2:

"Unfortunately, this statement could not fail to give rise to a feeling of profound disappointment. [This is the statement I had made.] It only strengthened our view that the Governments of the three Western Powers

continue to adhere to positions which offer no basis for the attainment of an agreement.”

What, then, is the present situation? The U.S.S.R., while recognizing existing Western rights in and to Berlin, still puts forward its second-preference plan as unveiled some months ago. It proposes that the Western Powers abandon their present rights in favor of the Soviet plan. This we will not do. We will have no share in imposing a new status on the West Berliners against their will. Such a new regime would make German unity more difficult to achieve since it would establish still a third part of Germany.

However, we recognize our responsibilities for keeping friction between our two systems to a minimum. We recognize that Berlin, because of its unique situation, can be a source of friction. We are willing to search in good faith with the Soviet Union for some reciprocal improvement in the Berlin situation. However, it should be very clear that any improvement arrangement must meet these criteria: (a) respect for existing Western rights of presence and access to Berlin and existing agreements concerning such rights since the Western presence is essential to maintain West Berlin's freedom; (b) no recognition of the so-called German Democratic Republic; (c) maintenance of West Berlin's political and economic ties with the West.

West Not Fooled by Soviet's "Free City" Label

Should we accept the Soviet's "free city" proposal? We cannot forget that this is not the first time that the Soviet Union has tried to put an end to a really free Berlin. Only 3 years after the war the U.S.S.R. tried to starve the free Berliners into the acceptance of a way of life which the Soviets would dictate. One remembers now that the Soviets' excuse then was that technical difficulties would not permit food or other traffic to flow into Berlin from West Germany. This time a more subtle approach is being attempted; the justification given is quite as transparent — to relax tensions, to remove "dangerous situations," to end occupation which "the events of life passed by."

Our reading of recent history indicates that the proposed "free city" would be but a disguise for gradual smothering of West Berliners' present freedom. In 1948 no one was really fooled by the "technical difficulties" alibi. In 1959 no one is being fooled by the false label "free city."

This is no time to resort to a breach of solemn international agreements under the guise of "relaxation of tensions." If the Soviet Government will exercise the necessary degree of responsibility and recognize the legitimate rights of other nations, the situation in Berlin may develop in a tolerable fashion. Today the world judges nations by their willingness to stand by their international obligations. The Soviet Government must recognize that Berlin is a solemn testing ground on which its intentions with respect to its international obligations are being watched.

In these troubled times peace with justice is the greatest goal to which man can aspire. I hope that the Soviet Union will be willing to demonstrate, by word and by deed, that it is ready to move toward that great goal.

Some Facts About East Berlin

There is another phase of this same problem on which I wish to touch quite briefly. I had hoped that I would not have to bring up this subject, but it has been made so clear to us that unless it is part of this record there will be an assumption from things that have been said here that West Berlin is a hotbed for all kinds of subversive efforts, whereas the surrounding territory, and, in fact, East Berlin, is completely free from any such intent or operations.

We have been forced to listen here to allegations that the Western Powers are using West Berlin to carry on subversive activity and hostile propaganda against the U.S.S.R., the so-called German Democratic Republic, and other countries.

Now it is strange that the Soviet Foreign Minister should have been so sensitive as to these alleged activities

and at the same time should have neglected to mention the highly objectionable activities conducted out of East Berlin. I should therefore like to place a few facts before this conference.

East Berlin is the site of one of the heaviest concentrations of subversive and spying activities in the world. On the part of the so-called German Democratic Republic alone it is reliably estimated that 26,000 officers, directing more than 200,000 agents and informers, are engaged in such activities detrimental to the interests of West Berlin and the Federal Republic, and countries beyond, including Scandinavia. A mass of documentation supports the fact that East Berlin has been systematically abused over many years as a center of subversion, kidnapping, spying, and numerous other hostile activities.

The goal of this centrally directed effort at subversion is the complete overthrow of the existing constitutional and social order in West Berlin and the Federal Republic.

The recruitment of spies, agents, and informers is done by every possible means, including the threat of reprisals against members of families residing in the so-called German Democratic Republic. The primary objective is, of course, subversion and espionage, including industrial espionage. But this is also part of a massive effort to infiltrate the West Berlin Government and Allied organizations in West Berlin as well as every other major organized activity, such as trade unions, works councils, and youth groups. The very recent revelation of the existence of such a ring of agents directed from East Berlin within the West Berlin and West German Christian Democratic Union Party provides a good illustration of the scope of such activities.

Innumerable acts of force originating in East Berlin have been carried out against people in West Berlin. The most sensational of these have been cases of kidnapping. Our own conservative calculations show there have been at least 63 actual cases, 31 attempted kidnappings, and 21 probable cases since the end of the war. Although drugs were used in a number of instances, most of these kidnappings involved the use of brute force. A report just completed by the Senate of Berlin confirms our figures.

General subversive activities, incitement to sedition, and attacks on public order directed from East Berlin comprehend a vast variety of activities. They are aimed at subverting the existing social, political, and economic order in West Berlin, with seizure of control as their eventual objective.

The East Berlin agents spread lies and rumors and conduct whispering campaigns. They send anonymous letters to wives or husbands to imply that their marriage partners are being unfaithful or to suggest any one of a number of slanderous possibilities. They seek to sow confusion by spreading false and contradictory reports. They try to create terror through threats or false rumors and reports. They make massive attempts to infiltrate organizations in West Berlin.

In this vast effort they employ a great variety of means including the use of individual operatives, the use of the Socialist Unity Party, which is still permitted to function in West Berlin, and the use of various mass organizations with headquarters in East Berlin, such as the Free German Trade Union Organization, the Free German Youth Organization, and the German Culture League.

East Berlin is being misused as the center of an extensive campaign of slanderous personal vilification against the institutions and officials of the Allies and of the German authorities in West Berlin. This involves the frequent use of lies as well as outright forgeries. A good example of this is the current campaign of vilification by press and radio against myself, the Foreign Minister of the Federal Republic, and other leading officials.

The fact that over 500 persons living or working in West Berlin were convicted of treasonable activities in a period from August 30, 1951, to the end of 1958 — an average of more than one a week — helps illustrate the scope and purpose of this attempt to subvert the existing order in West Berlin.

East German Subversive Apparatus

The apparatus of the so-called German Democratic Republic engaged in this evil work includes the Ministry for State Security, whose strength is 13,000 men. This is the basic overt and secret internal security arm of the regime. It also engages in clandestine operations against the Federal Republic and West Berlin.

One of its sectors is called Foreign Sector — Intelligence, with a strength of 500. The main mission of this bureau is to recruit espionage agents in the West. Its chief targets are the Federal Republic and West Berlin. Recruited agents are used not only to produce information but also for disruption and political action.

Another sector deals with counterintelligence and has a strength of 12,000 staff members in addition to 40,000 agents. This sector has two primary missions. The first is counterintelligence and counter-espionage within East Germany, using an infamous informer system in all segments of society. The second is penetration of Western organizations, such as church organizations, West German parties, and military and governmental offices. This bureau specializes in kidnappings by force or drugs and in coercing relatives residing in East Germany into luring refugees back to East Berlin, where they are arrested.

Then comes the Ministry of Defense's office entitled Administration for Coordination. This is a cover designation for the military intelligence service. It is responsible for clandestine procurement of intelligence on NATO military forces, especially the Federal Republic. It also uses coercion and corruption to recruit agents, mostly in the West.

The Ministry of Defense has another office, called the Independent Department. This is responsible for the subversion of the West German armed forces. It disseminates subversive propaganda and engages extensively in falsification and harassment operations. One example of this harassment is the sending of forged Federal Republic death notices to mothers of West German soldiers.

The East German mass organizations also play a role in the unceasing effort to subvert West Berlin and the Federal Republic. They include the Free German Trade Union Organization, the Free German Youth Organization, the Democratic Women's Federation, the German-Soviet Friendship Society, and the German Culture League. All have special Western sections whose primary functions are: to infiltrate parallel Federal Republic and West German groups, to recruit sympathizers and dupes, to promote Communist subversive aims through massive written and oral propaganda, and to send so-called "instructors" to the Federal Republic and West Berlin on special assignments for agitation, disruption, and subversion.

The propaganda and agitation activity of *Deutschlandsender*, *Berliner Rundfunk*, *Freiheitsender*, and East German TV has been violent and slanderous. Since this conference began, its output has risen in vituperation and fallen in ordinary decency.

An organ of the so-called German Democratic Republic Council of Ministers generates publications, press conferences, designed to label the Federal Republic as Nazi, militarist, and thirsting for revenge.

All levels of the so-called German Democratic Government, down to townships, are given assignments to organize large-scale writing of propaganda letters to Federal Republic and West Berlin individuals and organizations.

In addition to the state functionaries, at least 8,000 party and mass organization officials are engaged full time in subversive operations against the Federal Republic and West Berlin. Many thousands more are employed part time.

It is difficult to estimate the amount of money expended on these nefarious activities, but it is conservative to say it totals many scores of millions of dollars. This is money that could well be spent on improving the standard of living of the people of East Germany, which is noticeably below the standard of the people of the Federal Republic.

I have given an all-too-brief description of a situation which is both scandalous and dangerous. It is a sad commentary on the ethics of the men who conduct these activities. Those men comprise the regime of the

so-called German Democratic Republic, and that regime is neither German, nor democratic, nor a republic. More important still, it is a revelation of the determination of these men to achieve their objective by any means at hand. And that objective is to bring West Berlin and the Federal Republic under the control of an ideology which teaches that any means is legal and good which serves to impose it on the other peoples.

I sincerely regret having had to make these remarks. We need so much to concentrate on the major issues before us. But the matter on which I have spoken is not unrelated to these major issues, and I would not have raised it here had it not been for the repeated statements with regard to the activities that are being conducted in West Berlin and that are being considered a danger in the present situation.