

**Telegram From the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State**  
Moscow, May 27, 1961, 1 p.m.

Source: Department of State, Central Files, 762.00/5-2761. Secret; Priority. Repeated to Paris, London, Berlin, and Bonn

2939. Re Berlin tel to Dept 572 and Bonn tel 1971.<sup>1</sup> While I agree in main with analysis contained Berlin reftel I do not believe this is whole story. I not only do not believe Khrushchev has necessity of reporting progress on Berlin to Party Congress but believe he will deliberately wish to put off crisis until after he has further consolidated his position at Congress. However I consider K has so deeply committed his personal prestige and that of Soviet Union to some action on Berlin and German problems that if we take completely negative stand suggested by Berlin, this would probably lead to developments in which chances of war or ignominious Western retreat are close to 50-50. Situation is not changed by fact it is of K's own making. However, I believe there is real suspicion here that we and/or West Germans hope to develop position in which we can use force or threat of force to bring down Soviet empire in Eastern Europe. Both sides consider other would not risk war over Berlin. Danger arises from fact that if K carries out his declared intentions and we carry out ours, situation likely get out of control and military as well as political prestige would become involved making retreat for either side even more difficult. Soviets have strong nerves and far greater cohesion with their allies. Geography and local balance of forces are in their favor. Assuming we are prepared carry our policy through to end and K found he had misjudged us, would probably be too late for retreat. In these circumstances it seems to me we should make every effort avoid allowing such situation to develop.

I agree we should not allow gradual erosion our position by embarking on slippery path of tempting compromises. In my view President has difficult task of convincing K on one hand that we will fulfill our commitment to people of Berlin and on other that it is not our intention to saw off limb on which he has crawled. I believe best approach would be to tell him frankly that neither of our two great powers can suffer humiliating defeat over this issue and that we would be prepared to endeavor work out some kind of solution which would save face on both sides but essentially leave problem on ice while we attempt tackle other problems.

General background from which I view this problem is that it would not be to our advantage to revert to all-out cold war or have Soviet Union swing over to Chinese policy. Given President's programs I believe that despite recent Soviet successes time is on our side. I consider this the more true in view of real possibility eventual split between Soviet Union and Red China. Therefore consider our policy should be directed toward gaining time and reducing possibility of direct confrontation Soviet-US power. As I have frequently reported, additional reason for not simply taking uncompromising position is that lengths to which Soviets will go and extent to which we can maintain unity in Western camp will depend upon image this problem held by world opinion. At present time do not believe this satisfactory from our point of view. Since Geneva we have

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<sup>1</sup> Telegram 572 is printed as [Document 27](#); regarding telegram 1971, see [footnote 2](#) thereto

virtually dropped discussion our peace plan, whereas Soviets have constantly focused attention on their proposal. We have thus been maneuvered into position of saying no to proposal that would avoid warlike situation. Strongly believe we must put Soviets in position of saying no.

In view his conversation with me, quite possible K will attempt slide over Berlin problem in sweetness and light atmosphere. In this event believe President should force issue.<sup>2</sup>

Thompson

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<sup>2</sup> In telegram 1989 from Bonn, May 30, Ambassador Dowling expressed his agreement with the view that the United States should try to gain time and avoid a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union on Berlin, but he stressed that willingness to negotiate should pertain to German reunification and not just Berlin. He concurred that the West had been maneuvered into a bad public position on Berlin, and concluded that the President should force the issue along the lines suggested by Thompson. (Department of State, Central Files, 762.00/5-3061)

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