

CHAT M HOUSE



OXFORD JOURNALS
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

The Royal Institute of International Affairs

The Berlin Crisis 1958-1962

Author(s): Elisabeth Barker

Source: *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (Jan., 1963), pp. 59-73

Published by: Oxford University Press on behalf of the Royal Institute of International Affairs

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2610505>

Accessed: 25-07-2018 14:34 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Royal Institute of International Affairs, Oxford University Press are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*

THE BERLIN CRISIS 1958-1962

ELISABETH BARKER

FOR nine years—between May 1949 (the end of the blockade) and November 1958 (the start of Mr. Khrushchev's campaign against Western rights in the city)—there was relative calm over Berlin. As Berlin has always been an extremely sensitive point for both sides, it is perhaps surprising that the lull lasted so long. During this period a number of things happened which might have been expected to have big repercussions on Berlin: establishment of the Federal German Republic and the East German 'Democratic Republic'; establishment of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organisation; re-arming of East Germany and the creation of West German armed forces within NATO; the East Berlin uprising of June 17, 1953; the constant stream of refugees from East Germany through West Berlin. Yet throughout these developments, the Soviet Union refrained from attacking Western rights in the city, or the access routes.

In fact, when the Soviet Union signed a treaty with the East German Government on September 20, 1955, purporting to establish the sovereignty of the East German 'Democratic Republic' and its freedom to take decisions on all questions of domestic and foreign policy, the position of the Western Powers in Berlin was safeguarded in a simultaneous letter from the East German Foreign Minister, Herr Bolz, to the Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Zorin. The key passage was:

The control of traffic of troops and material of the garrisons of France, England and the United States stationed in West Berlin passing between the German Federal Republic and West Berlin will temporarily be exercised by the command of the Soviet troops in Germany, pending the conclusion of an appropriate agreement. To this end, the transportation of military personnel or of garrison material of the troops of the three Western Powers in West Berlin will be permitted on the basis of existing Four-Power decisions:

- (a) on the Autobahn Berlin-Marienborn,
- (b) on the railway line Berlin-Helmstedt,
- (c) in the air corridors Berlin-Hamburg, Berlin-Bueckeburg, and Berlin-Frankfurt-on-Main.

This was endorsed in the Soviet Notes to the Western Powers of October 18, 1955, stating that traffic control would be carried out by the command of the Soviet military forces in Germany 'temporarily until the achievement of a suitable agreement.'

These documents show that in 1955 the Soviet Government although it attached the term 'temporarily' to the continued functioning of four-Power agreements, definitely did not want any Berlin crisis; the same seems true of the whole nine-year period. Stalin, having discovered in 1948-49 that attempts to squeeze the life out of West Berlin were ineffective and unprofitable, did not want to try again. After his death, his successors were presumably too much occupied with internal quarrels and problems to want any external crisis for the first few years.

* * *

In the autumn of 1958 the lull ended. By then Mr. Khrushchev had firmly established his position as head of the Soviet power complex; for a year past, the Soviet mood had been particularly self-confident because the Sputnik had seemed to establish a clear technological lead for the Soviet Union over the United States. Mr. Khrushchev might therefore have felt in a strong enough position to risk a major crisis in relations with the West. However, whether he deliberately willed one is another question. On the one hand, he must certainly have regarded the Western presence in West Berlin as an anachronism and a most unwelcome obstacle to the final consolidation of the Soviet bloc in Eastern Europe. Perhaps he also really believed that West Berlin was an important centre for spying and subversive activities, and so a threat to the security of the bloc. Finally, he must have been under heavy pressure from the East German Government—struggling vainly with economic difficulties and widespread discontent, and powerless to check the flow of refugees to the West—to boost its prestige and authority in some spectacular way. Mr. Khrushchev therefore had good reasons for wanting to eliminate the Western presence in Berlin.

On the other hand, his speech of November 10, 1958, which started the whole crisis, bore many marks of improvisation and none of careful preparation for a major campaign against the West. The passage on Berlin came in the context of an emotional and highly-coloured attack on 'the militaristic circles of West Germany' and the alleged delivery of American nuclear weapons to West Germany. This led him on to the Potsdam Agreement and alleged Western violation of its demilitarisation provisions. This in turn led him into a rhetorical (and inaccurate) passage:

What then is left of the Potsdam Agreement? One thing, in effect: the so-called four-Power status of Berlin, that is, a position in which the three Western Powers—the United States, Britain and France—have the possibility of lording it in West Berlin, turning that part of the city, which is the capital of the German Democratic Republic, into some kind of State within a State and, profiting by this, conducting subversive

activities from Western Berlin against the German Democratic Republic, against the Soviet Union, and the other Warsaw Treaty countries. On top of all this, they have the right of unrestricted communications between Berlin and Western Germany through the air-space, by the railways, highways and waterways of the German Democratic Republic, a State which they do not even want to recognise. . . .

After a series of rhetorical questions, Mr. Khrushchev said :

Is it not time for us to reconsider our attitude to this part of the Potsdam Agreement, and to denounce it? . . . The time has obviously come for the signatories of the Potsdam Agreement to renounce the remnants of the occupation régime in Berlin, and thereby make it possible to create a normal situation in the capital of the German Democratic Republic. The Soviet Union, for its part, would hand over to the sovereign German Democratic Republic the functions in Berlin that are still exercised by Soviet agencies. This, I think, would be the correct thing to do. . . .

It was in these terms that Mr. Khrushchev launched the Berlin crisis. It is almost impossible that he could have consulted his political and legal experts on his phrasing, since they would have prevented him from making the mistake of deriving Western rights in Berlin from the Potsdam Agreement, instead of from Germany's unconditional surrender and the four-Power agreements of September 1944 and May 1945. It may also be significant that it was not until 17 days later—after Western spokesmen had pointed out Mr. Khrushchev's error and there had been a great deal of excitement and argument in the Western press—that the Soviet Foreign Ministry followed up Mr. Khrushchev's speech by Notes to the three Western Powers stating Soviet demands in much more formal terms, and, as if in passing, putting straight Mr. Khrushchev's mistake.

It therefore seems fair to assume that Mr. Khrushchev started the Berlin crisis without any real preparation, without any clear idea about the extent of his demands, the lengths to which he was prepared to go in order to achieve them, or even the methods and arguments he intended to employ. It is even possible that his remarks on Western rights in his speech of November 10 were impromptu. However, the obvious violence of the shock which they caused in the West quickly showed him that he had touched the West on an extremely vulnerable spot.

Ever since, Mr. Khrushchev has been probing and exploiting Western sensitivity over Berlin, sometimes deftly, sometimes clumsily, committing tactical blunders and retrieving them, blowing hot and cold, imposing and withdrawing time-limits, tightening and relaxing pressures, according to the needs and possibilities of the moment. At no time has he committed himself firmly enough to a given course of action for it to become a prestige question for him to fulfil the commitment. In fact, although the Soviet Union has obviously set itself the long-term goal of eliminating the Western presence in Berlin, there is so far no evidence

that Mr. Khrushchev has ever been willing to run any real risk of war—or even of a rupture of contacts with the West—in order to achieve this end.

* * *

The first phase of the Berlin crisis, from November 1958 to March 1959, was the phase of the setting of the first Soviet time-limit (of six months) and its withdrawal after Mr. Macmillan's Moscow visit.

The second phase was the Foreign Ministers' Conference in Geneva in the summer of 1959—the only serious and detailed attempt to negotiate a Berlin agreement. It ended inconclusively, but with agreement to resume negotiation later.

The third phase, from September 1959 to May 1960, opened in the honeymoon atmosphere of Mr. Khrushchev's talks with President Eisenhower at Camp David, continued with desultory preliminaries for a Summit conference, during which the atmosphere grew colder and colder, and ended with the U2 incident and the wreck of the Summit.

The fourth phase was the lull, from May 1960 till June 1961, during which Mr. Khrushchev waited for President Eisenhower to leave the White House and for President Kennedy to establish himself firmly in office.

The fifth phase opened in June 1961 with the meeting between Mr. Khrushchev and President Kennedy in Vienna, and Mr. Khrushchev's renewed threat of unilateral action over Berlin. In August the East Germans built the Berlin Wall. In September American-Soviet diplomatic contacts started in New York and continued spasmodically, in different places and at different levels, throughout the following year. This was a phase of mutual frustration, made dangerous at moments by the acute local tensions in Berlin resulting from the building of the Wall. Yet it looked as though neither side wanted to break off the contacts, however complete the stalemate.

From this sequence of events, it seems clear that although Mr. Khrushchev has no doubt often been subjected to strong pressures at home, from the East Germans, or from the Chinese, to bring the Berlin problem to a head, these have never been decisive. He has preferred, it seems, to keep the Berlin crisis in hand as a valuable asset in an eventual bargain or deal with the United States, probably on much wider issues.

* * *

Soviet demands on Berlin were stated in their extreme form at the opening of the first phase. All later statements fell short of the original

demands in some respect. The Soviet Note to the Western Powers of November 27, 1958, stated flatly that the Soviet Union considered the agreements on Berlin of September 1944 and May 1945 to be no longer in force. It went on:

The Soviet Government will enter into negotiations at the appropriate moment with the Government of the German Democratic Republic concerning the handing over to the German Democratic Republic of functions which were temporarily performed by Soviet organs on the basis of the above mentioned Allied Agreements, and also in accordance with the Agreement between the U.S.S.R. and the German Democratic Republic of September 20, 1955.¹

After this unilateral denunciation of four-Power agreements, the Soviet Note said that the 'occupation régime' in West Berlin must be ended and proposed that West Berlin should become a demilitarised free city, 'with no armed forces in it,' but guaranteed by the four Powers; the German 'Democratic Republic' might guarantee its unrestricted communications in return for an undertaking by West Berlin not to permit any hostile or subversive activity on its territory.

Then, in the form of a concession, the Note set the time-limit which caused so much trouble in the following months. It said that, to give time for talks between the two parts of Berlin and the two German Governments, 'the Soviet Government does not propose to introduce any changes in the existing arrangement of the military transport of Britain, the United States and France from West Berlin to the Federal German Republic for half a year. . . . If the specified period is not used for achieving the appropriate agreement, then the Soviet Union will execute the measures indicated by means of an agreement with the German Democratic Republic.'

This document was a dangerous one for all concerned. It had its ambiguities; but the Western Powers were bound to interpret it in the most serious way as a form of ultimatum, and certainly a direct threat to destroy their rights by presenting them, unilaterally, with a *fait*

¹ It is perhaps worth noting that the Soviet threat of unilateral action over the access routes was thus not originally linked with signature of a peace treaty: and indeed the 1955 Treaty between the Soviet Union and the German 'Democratic Republic' in no way suggested that it would be necessary to sign a treaty *before* the Soviet Union could hand over control of the access routes to the East German Government.

The logic of the Soviet position would seem to be that transfer of control of access is an action which the Soviet could take at any time by means of a purely bilateral agreement with the East German Government; whereas the removal of the Western garrisons from Berlin could only be done under the pretext of ending the 'occupation régime,' and for this it would be necessary first to sign a peace treaty, with or without participation of the Western allies. However, this distinction has usually been blurred in Soviet statements since 1958 and the general impression has been created that a peace treaty is an essential preliminary to *any* Soviet action against the West over Berlin. This blurring has probably suited the Soviet Union, partly because constant stress on a peace treaty is a good propaganda line, and partly, perhaps, because it provides a convenient pretext for resisting East German pressure for immediate Soviet action.

accompli. For Mr. Khrushchev, also, it was dangerous, since it came uncomfortably close to committing him to definite action by a definite date. (Even so, the Note did not make it absolutely clear whether the six-month time-limit was to start from the beginning of the proposed talks between West and East Berlin and the two German Governments, or from the day of the dispatch of the Note.)

During the next three months, in the face of firm and united Western opposition to the Soviet demands, Mr. Khrushchev beat a gradual retreat. The British, American, French and West German Foreign Ministers met in Paris on December 14, and stated that the three Western Powers were determined to maintain their position and their rights with respect to Berlin, including access rights; they found unacceptable the Soviet Government's unilateral repudiation of its obligations. Two days later, the NATO Council supported this position and added that the Western Powers remained ready to discuss the problem of Germany. On December 31 the Western Powers sent Notes to the Soviet Union saying, with reference to the six-month time-limit, that they could not embark on discussions with the Soviet Government under menace. Without this menace, they would be ready to discuss Berlin in the framework of the German problem and European security.

On January 10, 1959, the Soviet Government made a new move by presenting the world with a draft peace treaty for Germany, of which Article 25 provided for a special status for West Berlin as a demilitarised free city. In a covering Note it offered to examine other 'appropriate proposals' on West Berlin and said it was willing to have a 'preliminary exchange of opinion' with the Western Powers before summoning a peace conference. The six-month time-limit was not reaffirmed, but the Note said: 'No one can hinder the Soviet Union from relinquishing the functions which it performs in respect of Berlin . . . by means of an agreement with the German Democratic Republic.'

This was the first step towards a less dangerous Soviet position. On February 16 the Western Powers proposed a Foreign Ministers' conference; from February 21 to March 3 Mr. Macmillan visited Russia; Mr. Khrushchev's six-month time-limit was withdrawn; in a Note of March 2 the Soviet Union pressed for a Summit conference in preference to a Foreign Ministers' conference. In a speech in East Berlin on March 9 Mr. Khrushchev made a further small step backwards: 'If necessary, we could even agree to the United States, Britain, France, and the U.S.S.R., or neutral countries, maintaining some sort of minimum number of troops in West Berlin to guarantee its status of a free city, but with no right to interfere in its internal affairs.' (This apparent concession did however contain a new demand: Soviet troops should be stationed in West Berlin.) On March 6, Mr. Khrushchev said at a

press conference that he agreed that the Western Powers had lawful rights for their presence and added that this was why he had proposed a peace treaty, since it would make these rights invalid.

After further diplomatic exchanges, both sides agreed to hold a Foreign Ministers' conference in Geneva in May. The first phase of the Berlin crisis was over; Mr. Khrushchev had realised that the simple threat of unilateral action would not work, and had withdrawn from a dangerously exposed diplomatic position; both sides had agreed to attempt negotiation.

* * *

The outcome of the second phase—the Foreign Ministers' conference, May–August 1959—is a matter of argument, because the attempt at negotiation ended in mid-air and each participant assessed the results rather differently. However, it is beyond dispute that both the Soviet Union and the Western Powers were genuinely trying to negotiate a temporary accommodation, or standstill arrangement, for West Berlin. The stumbling-block was the fact that the Western Powers wanted a positive Soviet assurance that when the standstill arrangement came to an end their position in West Berlin would be no weaker than when it started; and that the Soviet Union did not want to give any explicit assurance. The Western Powers were also preoccupied by the need to avoid giving any form or recognition to the East German régime which would alienate their West German allies; but this seemed a lesser stumbling-block.

The conference began on May 11. Both sides started by stating their optimum proposals—the West through the Western Peace Plan of May 14, the Soviet Union by tabling the draft peace treaty of January 10, 1959. Each side knew that its proposal would be unacceptable to the other. So early in June they turned to discussing an interim arrangement for Berlin. The opening Soviet bid (June 10) was for a one-year arrangement, providing for reduction of Western troops to token contingents; a ban on hostile propaganda and subversive activities based in West Berlin; maintenance by the Soviet Union of existing communications with West Berlin; creation of an all-German committee to agree, within one year, on a peace treaty and reunification. The status of Western rights in Berlin at the end of the one-year period—if the committee had failed to agree—was left obscure.

The Western Powers countered with their proposal of June 16. This provided for limitation of Western troops to the existing level of 11,000 men and for possible future reductions 'if developments in the situation permit,' and continued free and unrestricted access to West Berlin for all persons and goods. It also said that without prejudice to

basic (*i.e.*, Soviet) responsibilities for access, existing procedures might be carried out by German (*i.e.*, East German) personnel.

From then on there was bargaining on the issues raised by the two proposals. There were moments when chances of agreement seemed good. However, the Soviet Foreign Minister, obviously anxious to avoid any appearance of a diplomatic climb-down, refused to make any commitment which might look like acquiescence in the Western presence in Berlin for an unlimited and undefined period.

The Western Powers, on their side, found some difficulty in agreeing fully among themselves. Each had its own special preoccupations. In Britain a general election was looming up; the idea of a negotiated Berlin settlement was popular with the British public—far more popular than in the United States. The American Secretary of State, Mr. Herter, had perpetually to keep in mind the kind of hostile criticism which any real or apparent concession to the Soviet Union would provoke in Congress. The American Government, moreover, was perhaps at that moment more sensitive than the British Government to pressures from the West German Government, which was watching anxiously on the side-lines, fearful lest the Western Powers might sacrifice the cause of German reunification to their desire to reduce tension over Berlin.

In the closing stage, the conference was dominated by an outside factor—President Eisenhower's invitation to Mr. Khrushchev to visit the United States. It is not clear what effect the President intended this move to have on the Geneva conference. In practice, it removed the incentive for the Foreign Ministers to make a final effort to reach agreement. So they broke off the attempt. Their final communiqué, of August 5, was discreetly cheerful. It said that the positions of both sides on certain points had become closer, and that the discussions which had taken place would be useful 'for the further negotiations which are necessary in order to reach an agreement.'

Just how near the Foreign Ministers had come to agreement remained in dispute. The British Foreign Secretary, Mr. Selwyn Lloyd, gave a possibly over-optimistic summing up, on August 5. He stressed the Soviet failure to give a definite promise about the status of Western rights at the end of an interim arrangement, but said he hoped that after careful study the Soviet Government would be able to give the kind of assurance the West wanted. He recorded failure to agree about an all-German committee, but hoped that Mr. Gromyko would eventually agree to the very loose formula suggested by the West (in order to avoid placing the East German Government on the same level as the West German Government). He pointed to the possibilities of agreement on limitation of Western forces in Berlin, reduction of 'questionable activities' (*i.e.*, hostile propaganda and subversion) throughout the city, and recorded Soviet willingness to maintain free access. He hinted at a

possible compromise over the duration of the interim arrangement, between the Western proposal of five years and the Soviet closing bid of 18 months, which had been combined with a Soviet statement that the actual duration was not a matter of importance or principle.

The American Secretary of State, Mr. Herter, took a considerably more pessimistic view of the progress made, but said he looked forward to a resumption of the Foreign Ministers' conference to redress the differences between the two sides. For the Soviet Union, Mr. Gromyko also listed the outstanding differences, with special emphasis on failure to agree about an all-German committee. But he said that the two sides had come closer, and looked forward to a Summit conference to settle matters on which the Foreign Ministers had failed to agree.

The second phase—the attempt at serious negotiation—thus ended in an almost holiday mood. Even if nothing precise had been agreed, at least no harm had been done.

* * *

The third phase, from September 1959 to May 1960, began well and ended badly. The Camp David meeting between President Eisenhower and Mr. Khrushchev resulted in an 'understanding' that negotiations on Berlin would be reopened. Mr. Khrushchev was obviously happy and pleased about his American visit, and seemed to be looking forward to a Summit conference.

Differences on tactics between the Western Powers—notably General de Gaulle's opposition to any unseemly haste—led to postponement of the Summit, and of any reopening of negotiations, until May 1960. During the Spring of 1960 Mr. Khrushchev's enthusiasm for a Summit conference visibly cooled, partly, perhaps, because of Western warnings (by, for instance, Mr. Herter and Dr. Adenauer) that little was to be expected of such a meeting, and statements that the Western interim proposals of June 1959 were no longer valid since they had been rejected by the Soviet Union. Probably, again, Mr. Khrushchev was subjected to criticism at home, and from the Chinese, about his supposed lack of toughness towards the West and his obvious liking for personal contacts with Western leaders.

Then came the U 2 incident. It is still a matter for argument whether this provided Mr. Khrushchev with an excuse, which he was already seeking, to prevent the Summit conference from taking place; or whether, without the U 2, there might have been a Summit which would have produced modest but mildly useful results, including progress towards an interim arrangement for West Berlin. What is certain is that the

wreck of the Summit put a stop to any renewal of negotiations. Nevertheless Mr. Khrushchev, before leaving Paris, had publicly made it clear that he was not going to set any new time-limit for a Berlin settlement.

* * *

The fourth phase, from May 1960 to June 1961, began with local trouble in Berlin over East German attempts to restrict access for West German civilians, which were successfully countered by West German economic measures. On the diplomatic front Mr. Khrushchev had made it known, after the wreck of the Summit, that he would not negotiate so long as President Eisenhower was in office. After Mr. Kennedy became President in January 1961 the position obviously changed; and it seemed that Mr. Khrushchev was deliberately exercising restraint, and was refraining from embarrassing him. He did not press the President on the Berlin issue until he met him in Vienna in June 1961.

* * *

In spite of Mr. Khrushchev's apparent moderation during the preceding months, the tone in which he raised the Berlin problem in Vienna was harsh and uncompromising. He reintroduced the open threat of unilateral action and the implied threat of a time-limit. The meeting therefore started a phase of greatly heightened tension.

The main points of the *aide mémoire* which Mr. Khrushchev handed to President Kennedy on June 4, 1961, were familiar: the 'occupation régime' in West Berlin had outlived itself; the occupation rights would cease on the signing of a German peace treaty; West Berlin should become a demilitarised free city, maintaining unrestricted contacts with the outside world; it must cease to be a base for the incitement of hostile activity. As a guarantee for the free city, token troop contingents of three Western Powers and the Soviet Union could be stationed there, or contingents from neutral states under United Nations aegis.

Then came the threats. The *aide mémoire* said there should be an immediate peace conference to conclude a treaty. If the Western Powers were not ready for this, there could be negotiations between the two German Governments on reunification and a peace treaty. 'To avoid delay of a peace settlement it is necessary to fix a time-limit. . . . The Soviet Government consider that not more than six months are needed for such negotiations.' If the United States did not agree to signing a treaty, the Soviet Union would sign one separately. This would put an end to the occupation régime in West Berlin with all its implications; 'notably, all questions of communication by land, water or air through

the German Democratic Republic will be settled by appropriate agreements with the German Democratic Republic.'

Mr. Khrushchev may have imagined that he was merely re-stating his 1959 proposals in more forceful terms, with the substitution of a six-month time-limit for his 1959 proposal of 12 or 18 months for all-German discussions. The Western Powers could only take his words as a deliberate threat, all the more serious in that it was uttered at his first meeting with an American President since the wreck of the Summit conference; and they reacted accordingly. On July 17 they sent moderately-worded but firm Notes to Moscow restating that neither the Soviet Union nor East Germany could unilaterally deprive the three Western Powers of their rights in Berlin, including rights of access, pointing out that the 'free city' plan would open the door to constant East German interference in West Berlin's affairs, and warning the Soviet Government of the grave dangers of any Soviet attempt to produce a *fait accompli*. To reinforce this warning, various precautionary military measures were taken by the Western Powers, especially the United States, and Western spokesmen said that the risks involved in the situation included nuclear war. At the end of August Mr. Khrushchev tried to make use of these Western warnings as justification for his resumption of nuclear tests.

However, the Western Powers always kept open the possibility of negotiation. The Western Notes of July 17 spoke of Western acceptance of 'the possibility of practical arrangements intended to improve the present situation in Berlin,' and also of Western readiness to consider 'a freely negotiated settlement of the unresolved problems of Germany'. Lord Home and other Western representatives repeatedly stressed the three essentials of the Western position—freedom of West Berlin, freedom of access, and maintenance of the Western garrisons as a guarantee of these freedoms—and said that if the Soviet Union accepted these essentials negotiation would be possible.

On August 13, 1961, came the building of the Berlin Wall by the East Germans, with full Soviet support. This act greatly increased both local and international tension, and the human suffering which it inflicted caused great indignation in many countries. Yet in so far as it stopped the rapidly-swelling flood of refugees from East Germany, it removed one of the pressures on Mr. Khrushchev to act quickly against the Western position in Berlin. Another by-product was that the East German Government specifically described the sector boundary between East and West Berlin as a state frontier, thereby presumably abandoning any claim that West Berlin formed part of the territory of the East German State.

In spite of the heightened tension, the United Nations General Assembly in September gave an opportunity for the American Secretary

of State, Mr. Rusk—and Lord Home—to have private talks with Mr. Gromyko, who also saw President Kennedy in Washington. The main Western purpose at this stage was to convince again the Soviet Union of the danger of rash action over Berlin. On the Soviet side, the time-limit was quietly dropped. It was generally expected that the contacts would be continued, but President de Gaulle was opposed to discussions which, he thought, might develop into negotiation on unfavourable terms. At the NATO ministerial council in December, a formula was worked out, with considerable difficulty, to overcome this obstacle and allow the contacts to proceed—‘in the hope that these might serve to determine whether a basis for negotiation could be found.’

Early in 1962, there were talks in Moscow between the United States Ambassador, Mr. Llewellyn Thompson, and Soviet Ministers; at the opening of the disarmament conference in Geneva in mid-March there were further talks (overshadowed by Soviet harassing tactics in the air corridors) between Mr. Gromyko, Mr. Rusk and Lord Home. These led to periodic meetings during the summer between the new Soviet Ambassador in Washington, M. Dobrynin, and Mr. Rusk; and once again, in the opening stage of the 1962 U.N. Assembly, there were Rusk-Gromyko and Home-Gromyko meetings.

Throughout these meetings, there was no sign at all of any Soviet wish to start real negotiations. President Kennedy tried to break the deadlock with a plan for an international access authority to govern the three air corridors and the Helmstedt-Berlin *autobahn*, which he first mentioned in an interview with Mr. Adzhubei, editor of *Izvestia* and Mr. Khrushchev's son-in-law, in November 1961, and which was later raised by the United States Ambassador in Moscow early in 1962. The Soviet Union showed little interest, but in late March the East German Communist leader, Herr Ulbricht, countered with a plan (which had already been privately mooted by Mr. Gromyko in Geneva) for an arbitration board to deal with differences between the Western Powers and the East German Government over the access routes; the Soviet Union was to be responsible for settling disputes with the East German Government. The Ulbricht plan was conditional on withdrawal of the Western garrisons and their possible replacement by symbolic contingents of neutral troops. If for this reason alone, it was quite unacceptable to the West, and there seemed little chance of working out a compromise between the Kennedy plan and the Ulbricht plan.

However, in April, the United States developed further the idea of an International Access Authority, with the suggestion that 13 governments should be represented—the four Powers, West and East Germany, West and East Berlin, Czechoslovakia, Poland and three neutrals, Austria, Sweden and Switzerland. This suggestion was leaked prematurely and led to some unpleasantness between the United States

and Dr. Adenauer. In any case, since the Soviet Union showed no desire to follow it up, the plan had to go into cold storage.

There was also an apparent hardening of the Soviet attitude over the Western garrisons. In 1959 it had appeared that there might be room for a compromise on this key question. In 1962 the Soviet stand seemed to be uncompromising insistence that the garrisons must go; references to 'symbolic Western contingents' were dropped from the standard Soviet propaganda line. Herr Ulbricht spoke in March of symbolic contingents, but from neutral nations only. On July 10 Mr. Khrushchev, addressing the Moscow disarmament congress, made publicly a suggestion which had earlier been aired privately by the Soviet Ambassador in Washington: that the troops of the three Western Powers should be replaced by contingents from Denmark and Norway or Belgium and Holland, together with contingents from Poland and Czechoslovakia, under the United Nations flag. The Western Powers considered that these arrangements would not give any secure guarantee of freedom for West Berlin.

Even then, the Soviet attitude remained slightly unclear. In an interview which Mr. Khrushchev gave to a former Belgian Minister, M. Scheyven, in September 1962, which was published in the following month, he again spoke of the possibility of a temporary arrangement for symbolic contingents of British, American and French troops to remain in West Berlin, provided they were joined by a Soviet contingent.

On September 11, a Soviet official statement created agitation by the remark, made in the context of a tirade against United States policy over Cuba, that the Soviet Union was ready to take account of the fact that it would be difficult for the United States Government to discuss Berlin until after the Congressional elections on November 6. Some people took this as a threat or warning of some dramatic Soviet move over Berlin in mid-November; in the light of later events it seems more likely that it was part of a wider attempt to distract American attention from the Soviet plan to put missiles into Cuba. It may also have been intended to have a soothing, rather than an alarming, effect.

At the end of four years, and of the fifth and longest phase, of the Berlin crisis, there had been no real change either in Soviet demands or in the Western position; chances of a negotiated settlement seemed remote and elusive. On the other hand, Soviet threats of unilateral action had lost some of their potency. The most likely prospect seemed a long period of Soviet nerve warfare over Berlin, combined with local harassing tactics and attempts to undermine the Western position in Berlin by local action.

* * *

Since November 1958, there have been three possible courses open to the Western Powers in their dealings with the Soviet Union over Berlin.

First, they can assume that Mr. Khrushchev wants a nuclear war as little as they do, stand firm on their rights and preserve their position in Berlin. The staunchest champions of this course have been Dr. Adenauer and General de Gaulle, who have held, with some justification, that any change in the *status quo* was bound to weaken the Western position in the city.

Secondly, they can try to negotiate an interim arrangement (which might in practice last indefinitely, even if initially limited to a fixed period—always provided that the world balance of power is maintained). To achieve this it would be necessary to make certain concessions on non-essential issues, such as a greater degree of co-operation with the East German régime. The British Government believed in this course at least up till May 1960; and the United States thought it worth trying. If Mr. Khrushchev had not presented such a harsh and unyielding front at the Vienna meeting in June 1961, both Britain and the United States would almost certainly have been prepared to try again.

Thirdly, the Western Powers can seek at all times to maintain contacts with the Soviet Government on the Berlin question, with the double aim of keeping the Soviet Union constantly aware of the danger of unilateral action, and of watching for any change in the Soviet attitude which would make negotiation a profitable undertaking. This is the course which the United States has been following, with full British support, since September 1961. General de Gaulle has remained aloof and the West German Government's attitude has been unclear.

The first course has a certain simple logic but it also has its risks: squabbling among the Western Powers; wear-and-tear on the nerves of the West Berliners; possible erosion of the city's economic position; the danger of local incidents getting out of hand; the possibility that Western public opinion, even in West Germany, may in the end become bored and indifferent over the fate of Berlin, or succumb to some moment of panic. Above all, there is the danger of miscalculation by the Soviet leaders, who might at some stage carry local harassment too far and spark off a war by mistake.

The second course—negotiation—can of course only be followed if the Soviet Union seems seriously interested. It is quite possible that until the wreck of the Summit Conference in May 1960 Mr. Khrushchev was seriously interested. It is even conceivable that at the Vienna meeting in June 1961 he misplayed his hand, so that what was merely intended as an opening gambit was taken for an ultimatum. However, between September 1961 and October 1962 he certainly showed no interest at all in getting down to negotiation. His behaviour suggested that he found it easier and more profitable to keep a Berlin crisis

perpetually simmering than to make any of the concessions needed for a negotiated settlement.

The third course—maintaining diplomatic contacts—has some, though not all, of the risks of the first course; and like the second course, it can only be pursued so long as the Soviet Union is willing. As the most flexible course, and the one most likely to prevent Soviet miscalculation, it is the best available at the moment. Yet it would be a pity if the Western Powers were to relax their watch for any shift in the Soviet position which might make the second course a practicable possibility.

Miss Elisabeth Barker is Diplomatic Correspondent, External Services News Department, B.B.C.