

July 2, 1961

Record of a Conversation [between] N. S. Khrushchev and F. Roberts, British Ambassador in the USSR concerning the Signing of a Peace Treaty with the Two German States

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Summary:

The two parties discuss the national exhibitions in Moscow and London, and opportunities for trade between England and the Soviet Union. Khrushchev puts forth his intentions to sign the peace agreement with Germany as soon as possible and to declare Berlin a free city. Roberts is worried that the peace agreement will limit the rights of Western nations in Western Germany and Western Berlin.

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Record of a conversation [between] N. S. Khrushchev and F. Roberts, British Ambassador in the USSR concerning the signing of a peace treaty with the two German states

aThe title of the document was partially used.

2 July 1961

On 2 July a conversation was held with F. Roberts during N. S. Khrushchev's visit to a performance of the Royal Ballet troupe. The record of the conversation is cited below.

F. Roberts says that in a few days he will leave for London for the opening of the Soviet industrial exhibition. During his time in London he will have meetings and conversations with Prime Minister Macmillan.

bunderlined from this point on.

N. S. Khrushchev notes that the British exhibition in Moscow and the Soviet exhibition in London have great importance for the development of trade between our countries. He asks the Ambassador how, in his opinion, will trade relations between the Soviet Union and Britain develop in the future if Britain makes threats against the Soviet Union if it signs the peace treaty with the GDR. The USSR is going to sign the treaty without fail.

F. Roberts says it is not making such threats.

N. S. Khrushchev replies that such threats were contained not only in statements by Macmillan but also from the American and French leaders. France even decided to withdraw one division from Algeria to reinforce NATO troops in Europe. Only the Algerian patriots, for whom it will be easier to fight, benefit from this act. NATO is hardly reinforced thanks to the addition to its forces of one division. Right now, when the nature of war has radically changed, the number of divisions plays no role.

N. S. Khrushchev asks why Britain does not want to sign the peace treaty.

F. Roberts replies that Britain is not opposed to the signing of a treaty. But it is necessary to wait and discuss the question through negotiations in order to find an acceptable solution. It would be desirable for decisive measures not to be taken before the elections in the FRG.

N. S. Khrushchev says that 16 years have already passed since the end of the War and it is impossible to wait any longer.

As regards a solution to the question, then we think that the most rational and only acceptable solution is the conclusion of a peace treaty with the two German states and the declaration of West Berlin as a free city. Only on this basis are we ready to hold negotiations. If the Western powers do not agree to the conclusion of a peace treaty then the Soviet Union will conclude a treaty with the GDR and the rights of the Western powers ensuing from the German surrender will be abolished in connection with the cessation of the state of war with the GDR.

cSIC.

The Soviet proposal about the declaration of West Berlin as a free city provides for

freedom of choice for the population of West Berlin in [their] social and political way of life. It provides a guarantee of this freedom; however, we are offering to come to agreement about who will act as the guarantor. This can be the United Nations, or neutral countries, or the troops of the four powers. Therefore the objections of the Western powers in connection with the fact that they have obligations with respect to ensuring the freedom of the population of West Berlin are groundless.

The Soviet proposal also provides for preserving the free city of West Berlin's ties with the outside world. The Western powers are deprived of occupation rights, but access will be preserved on the basis of agreements with West Berlin and the independent and sovereign state of the GDR in accordance with the norms of international law. Although the Western power do not want to deal with the government of the GDR they will have to do this.

The position of the Western powers is explained not by their interests being infringed by the signing of the peace treaty, for this will not happen. The problem is that in opposing the peace treaty the Western powers are supporting their NATO ally, West Germany. It turns out that Adenauer plays the main role here, but Adenauer is an evil person.

F. Roberts noted that definite progress was achieved in the discussion of the German problem at the conference of the ministers of foreign affairs of the four powers in Geneva in 1959.

N. S. Khrushchev replies that right now the Soviet Union cannot consider the Geneva Conference as a basis for negotiations on the German question. The Western powers themselves do not want to take the results of this Conference as a basis. But they should know that this is also not a basis for us. The Geneva of 1959 is a stage which has passed.

As concerns the position of the FRG on the question of a peace treaty it was clearly expressed in the recent statement of FRG Bundestag President Gerstenmaier, who declared that the signing of a peace treaty with the two German states would legitimize and perpetuate the division of Germany. But Germany has been divided into two states. It is crystal clear that right now it is impossible to raise the question of the reunification of Germany. Not only we understand this. Britain, France and essentially the US, too, also do not want the reunification of Germany. De Gaulle has even spoken in the sense that three Germanys would be even better. How can one try and reunify Germany? Adenauer does not want the FRG to become socialist. Ulbricht, of course, will not agree to the establishment of a capitalist order in the GDR. It means that Adenauer is thinking of the reunification of Germany as West Germany's absorption of the German Democratic Republic. He wants us to agree to the liquidation of socialism in the GDR. But we are Communists and will never agree to this. Accordingly, an attempt to reunify Germany means war, yes, war.

F. Roberts asks [Khrushchev] to explain why the rights of the Western powers with respect to West Berlin will be abolished after the signing of a peace treaty between the USSR and the GDR.

N. S. Khrushchev replies that after the signing of a peace treaty the state of war will end on all the territory of the GDR, including West Berlin, and will remain only on the other side of the Elbe. Therefore the rights of the Western powers are maintained only beyond the Elbe. They will have no such rights on GDR territory.

West Berlin will be declared a free city with independent status. The Western powers will certainly to have a treaty with the GDR government to gain access to West Berlin. If the Western powers refuse to do this and try to break through to West Berlin by

force this will mean a war in which possibly hundreds of millions of people on both sides will die, and all for the sake of part of a city with a population of two and a half million people. Do the Western powers want this?

F. Roberts says that the Western powers have certain obligations to the population of West Berlin. In addition, if right now the Western powers deal with the question of access to West Berlin with the Soviet Union on the basis of certain agreements, then after conclusion of a treaty they will have to rely in this question on a government with which they have neither any relations nor any business.

N. S. Khrushchev explains that after the signing of the peace treaty the rights of the Western powers ensuing from surrender of Germany will be abolished. The Soviet Union will have nothing to do with questions connected with access to West Berlin. In accordance with the normal of international law it will be necessary to have an agreement with the GDR as a sovereign state.

As regards the complaints of the Western powers with respect to the fact that the Soviet Union supposedly wants to unilaterally abolish rights based on international agreements, in this connection one can cite such an example: when the Western powers signed the peace treaty with Japan the Soviet Union did not sign this treaty and we were told that our rights in Japan were abolished and they declared to our representatives in Tokyo that their functions had ended.

F. Roberts says that the rights of the Western powers in West Berlin have a historical basis. When Germany surrendered and the War ended, the troops of the Western allies were on territory to the east of the Elbe located in the present-day GDR. They withdrew their troops beyond the Elbe, and at the same time the Soviet Union invited them to Berlin.

N. S. Khrushchev replies that the Soviet Union recognizes that the Western powers received rights in West Berlin at one time connected with the surrender of Germany and by agreement with us. However, right now we want to liquidate the state of war with Germany and sign a peace treaty with the German states. This means the abolition of the occupation rights. It cannot be otherwise. It is not understood why the Western countries do not want to conclude a peace treaty if they do not want to use West Berlin in the interests of war.

F. Roberts notes that the Western countries are not saying that they do not want to conclude a peace treaty. They are saying that they want to hold negotiations.

N. S. Khrushchev says that the Soviet Union agrees to hold negotiations about concluding a peace treaty, but the Western countries are making threats. Mistrust is expressed that Ulbricht can guarantee the freedom of West Berlin. We suggest: let's make such a guarantee together. Let's agree that contingents of troops of the four great powers be located in West Berlin. This will be a reliable guarantee.

Regarding the upcoming meeting of the Ambassador with Macmillan, N. S. Khrushchev says that he has met and talked with Macmillan many times. In the course of these conversations the speakers always expressed respect for one another.

It is necessary for Macmillan to understand the need to find a rational way out of the situation which has been created, a rational solution to the contentious question. I rely on the experience and intelligence of Mr. Macmillan.

We propose signing a peace treaty and ensuring the freedom of choice of the

population of West Berlin. We think that is a reasonable approach. If you begin to say that you have responsibilities, then this discussion will not lead to anything. A solution on a rational basis needs to be found which would not infringe on the prestige of countries. This is what we are proposing.

The Soviet Union wants to clear up relations with the West, and this is [its] sincere desire. If we sign the peace treaty with Germany we will not have cause for friction.

At the present time the Soviet Union has good trade relations with Britain. British industrialists want to trade with us, and we have something to trade. We also want to trade on a mutually advantageous basis. There are very good trade relations with France and Italy, and very good trade relations with Japan. We even trade well with West Germany. Trade with West Germany is going better for us than with Britain. We do not trade with the US. They do not want to trade with us. But this is not our fault. Britain has turned out to be smarter than the US.

The only thing that inflames the situation is Germany. If the German question is solved, the question of a peace treaty, then there will be no more disputes between us. There is nothing to divide us. The Western countries are for capitalism, and the Soviet Union is for Communism. We believe in Communism and you don't - this is your right. We not only do not plan to fight because of this but we will not even argue. This cannot even be a subject for an argument.

Interests collide in Germany, Mr. Ambassador. Therefore this disagreement should be ripped out like a bad tooth. The Soviet Union does not want to spread Communism to all of Germany. This would be stupid. But the Western countries would like for all of Germany to be capitalist, but this cannot be.

As concerns the question of borders, the current borders are final. Britain, France, and even the US agree with this. Adenauer also thinks this is so, but cannot talk about this. But inasmuch as he is an ally of the Western powers in NATO, they support him.

Thus, Berlin right now is the subject of differences and dangerous friction between us. The Soviet government has thought much about how the Berlin question can be solved without damage to the prestige of both sides. We have thought much on this account, and we have come to the conclusion that there is only one possibility - the declaration of West Berlin as a free city.

There is another possibility, of course - this is the incorporation of West Berlin into the GDR, but such a step would hurt the prestige of the Western countries. The population of West Berlin has chosen the capitalist system and wants to live with this system. We don't want to intervene and change this situation.

N. S. Khrushchev further said that in conversations with Macmillan in Moscow and in New York he explained to Macmillan that West Berlin is not some acquisition for the Soviet Union, and we have no intentions of absorbing it. The territory of this city is not of interest, and the population of two million people also has no great importance. Consequently, if we raise the question of a solution to the Berlin problem we want to cut the tangle causing the clashes between us.

If the Soviet Union had demanded an expansion of the borders of the GDR at the expense of West Germany such a demand would actually have an aggressive nature. Claims from West Germany against the territory of the GDR would also mean aggression. But we are not advancing such proposals. At the same time we cannot tolerate the situation which exists at the present time in West Berlin lasting forever. This damages our prestige. West Berlin is on GDR territory. We want to sign a peace

treaty with the GDR if we don't come to agreement about signing with the two [German] states. The Western countries are refusing to sign such a treaty. It is not understood for what [purpose] they want to preserve the source of conflicts, the source of a dangerous tension.

F. Roberts says that it is hard to single out the main point in such a complex question as the Berlin question but, in his opinion, the question of access is such a point. He again returns to the fact that at the present time access to West Berlin is exercised on the basis of the agreement of the Western powers with the Soviet Union. After the signing of the peace treaty the rights of access of the Western powers to West Berlin should be based on an agreement with East Germany, with which the Western countries do not have relations.

N. S. Khrushchev says that the Ambassador has incorrectly understood the question of rights, and explains that after the signing of the peace treaty the Western powers lose the right of access to West Berlin, including the right to have an air corridor. The peace treaty means the cessation of the state of war on the territory of the GDR and the termination of all rights ensuing from this state of war.

Completely new conditions are created. Freedom of access to West Berlin will be ensured if the Western powers have corresponding agreements with West Berlin and with the government of the GDR, although they do not want to recognize this government.

The Soviet Union plans to sign a peace treaty with the GDR. The Western powers do not want to recognize this and want to preserve the rights ensuing from the surrender of Germany. They might demand the preservation of such rights with respect to Bonn, but with respect to Berlin. The GDR is a sovereign state and the Western powers ought have an agreement with it.

Why do the Western powers need an air corridor and special occupation rights in West Berlin? For no one is threatening West Berlin. Its population is guaranteed the freedom of choice of a social and political system. We are ready to implement such guarantees with our armed forces together with the forces of the three Western powers in West Berlin. The Western powers should understand the common sense of our proposals and agree to the liquidation of a breeding ground of dangerous conflicts.

I repeat, why demand a special air corridor to West Berlin? Aerial communications exist between the Soviet Union and Britain. Our planes fly over the territory of Denmark. We need an agreement with Denmark for this, and we demand no special conditions. We have to simply come to an agreement with Denmark. Just like after the signing of the peace treaty with the GDR [air] traffic over the territory of this state should be accomplished on the basis of agreements providing in such cases by international law.

F. Roberts says that the psychological aspect also ought to be considered in this question. The population of West Berlin does not want a change of its status, and knows that at the present time its freedom is guaranteed by the Western powers. It is not confident that the changes proposed by the USSR will lead to better or worse.

As concerns the proposal of the Soviet Union about a guarantee of the freedom of West Berlin by the armed forces of the four powers, including the USSR, in the Ambassador's words the Western powers are put into an unequal position here since the Soviet Union brings its troops through the territory of the GDR, its friendly country, at the time as the Western powers will have to bring its troops through the territory of a state with which it has no relations.

N. S. Khrushchev comments that the Western powers will also bring troops through the territory of its own ally, the FRG.

He asks that Macmillan be passed that the Soviet government is ready to hold negotiations on the conclusion of a peace treaty and is ready to sign a peace treaty with the two German states. The signing of a treaty with both German states would be an ideal solution to the question.

We are ready to sign any agreement about guarantees with respect to West Berlin. The GDR also agrees with this. With achievement of an agreement access will be implemented on the basis of appropriate agreements with West Berlin and the GDR.

If the Western powers insist on preserving their special rights after the signing of a peace treaty with the GDR by the Soviet Union then this will mean that they want to deprive us of the right to sign the treaty ourselves, without their permission. The Soviet Union defeated Germany in the War and will never agree to such a humiliation. If the Western powers want us to capitulate to West Germany [and] they want to put us on [our] knees, then they can be assured that this will never happen and will never be.

If they try to carry out their threats by force to achieve the preservation of the rights which presently exist, then our forces, missiles, and atomic bombs will be immediately put into action. We will respond with all our forces, there will be no other way for us. We will defend ourselves. But if the matter comes to atomic war then Britain, France, and West Germany should understand that this will mean suicide for them. The Soviet Union will suffer badly. We might lose tens of millions of people, The US, too, will lose tens of millions of people. But the West European countries with their concentration of resources on a small territory will be destroyed.

Explain to your Prime Minister that this is not a threat from our side. This is defense. The Western powers are threatening us. We want to sign the peace treaty, but Macmillan declares that he will stand firmly. The US and France also speak of their intention to stand firmly. But we also will stand firmly. The Soviet Union has withdrawn a certain number of troops from East Germany, but we can not only increase our forces, but also bring atomic bombs into readiness. They say that in Britain people are divided into pessimists and optimists. The pessimists think that six bombs are sufficient to destroy Britain, and the optimists say that nine will be required.

d SIC.

e SIC.

f SIC.

F. Roberts notes he is counted among the pessimists.

N. S. Khrushchev says that the matter here is not in the number of bombs. There's no need to frighten us. We are Bolsheviks, revolutionaries, we made a Revolution almost unarmed. But right now they're trying to deprive us of the right to sign a peace treaty with the GDR because Adenauer, an ally of the Western powers, does not want this. Gerstenmaier, the President of the FRG Bundestag, declared in his recent speech that the signing of a peace treaty would perpetuate the division of Germany. Evidently the leaders of the FRG want to tear socialist Germany away from us, but they won't succeed in doing this.

N. S. Khrushchev asks that Macmillan be passed that we are ready to hold negotiations about the conclusion of a peace treaty and the creation of the free city

of West Berlin. But if the Western powers do not agree to sign a peace treaty we will sign it alone and stop recognizing their rights.

If they try to break through to West Berlin by force then Soviet troops will meet them on GDR territory. They are there to do this, and to not let in the troops of the Western powers. Actually, they have no other missions there. But this would mean war. And it would be very desirable if all this remained theoretical reasoning. We are all adults and should understand what war means. We openly say that we are ready for negotiations, ready to sign a peace treaty, and in connection with threats made against us, are also ready for the worst. If they impose a war on us, we will defend ourselves. But an attempt to break through by force is war.

Why [should] we fight because of West Berlin? Why sacrifice tens of millions of lives because of the two-million population of this city? No one plans to encroach on West Berlin. Britain also does not need West Berlin. Adenauer needs it to maintain a source of conflict in order to play us off against one another.

History moves forward relentlessly, presenting ever-newer problems.

At the summit conference in Geneva in 1955 there was an argument between the participants concerning the wording of the final communiqué. We were in favor of putting the question of disarmament which was raised as the main question in the first place, and the solution of the German problem being second. The Western powers wanted to put the German question in first place. Is there now a controversy on this question? All this now seems ridiculous. But the argument started then.

N. S. Khrushchev expresses the hope that Macmillan correctly understands the situation which has been created. N. S. Khrushchev says, I think that Kennedy also understand, but certain political forces inside the country are influencing him. In Britain neither the Conservatives nor the Laborites want conflict with the Soviet Union because of Berlin, and the Conservatives understand the situation even better than the Laborites.

As concerns the recent statement of Macmillan in Parliament it was obviously made from solidarity with NATO allies.

F. Roberts says that Macmillan's speech reflected a desire for a settlement of differences through negotiations. He spoke of the firmness of Britain's position on a number of questions, in particular on the question of the freedom of the population in West Berlin.

N. S. Khrushchev says that we, too, are for freedom. But we are for freedom on the basis of freedom, but the Western powers want freedoms on the basis of the occupation.

F. Roberts notes that in the solution of the problem about West Berlin not only the population of this city should be satisfied, but also the entire world. It is necessary that everyone sees what freedom is.

N. S. Khrushchev says that our proposals possibly do not satisfy Brandt, but we do not plan to convince him. The Soviet Union fought Germany and lost 20 million people. At the same time Britain lost only 200,000 and right now the Western powers are making threats against us.

F. Roberts says that in his opinion the Western powers do want to make threats.

N. S. Khrushchev replies that statements about the firmness of a position is a threat

in itself. The return of American aircraft to French air bases is also a threat. De Gaulle's recall of a division from Algeria is also a threat. But the Soviet Union is not afraid of threats. In case of necessity we can deploy 300 divisions. The Soviet Union wants to solve the problem peacefully. We will not fight, but we will defend ourselves. We will not allow ourselves be pushed around. The Soviet Union will sign the peace treaty with the GDR. I declare again that if the Western powers try and break through by force, then they are attacking us, and we will defend ourselves.

It is necessary to realistically approach a solution of contentious questions and the situation which has been created. There are sober-thinking people among the government leaders and journalists of the Western countries. The storm needs to be avoided.

N. S. Khrushchev again notes the great importance of an exchange of exhibitions between Britain and the USSR in the development of trade between our countries. He says that the British exhibition in Moscow was very good and that propaganda in products is the best kind of propaganda.

F. Roberts thanks N. S. Khrushchev for the frank and clear statements. He says that, although he does not agree with everything that N. S. Khrushchev said, he now better understands the position of the Soviet Union, which he will discuss in his upcoming conversations with Macmillan.

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