

Secretary Rogers and Foreign Minister Gromyko, Oct. 16, 1970, New York

SUBJECT: Berlin

(State Telegram 172337)

Gromyko recalled the meeting which he had had with the Secretary nearly a year ago at which it had been suggested that an exchange of views take place aimed at normalizing the situation in the Berlin area. The objective was to rule out unexpected developments and to ease tension. The US had promised to study the matter and the Soviets had thereafter received the US position. Discussions had begun between the four Ambassadors in March. The Soviets felt that these discussions were not having much success. They seemed to be moving one step forward and one step backward or simply marking time. He did not want to cast aspersions on the participants, but asked that all parties approach the question as statesmen.

If the United States wants to promote normalization of the situation, then it will have to clarify where it stands. The Soviets want to have productive results. He wished to emphasize that the Soviets have no intention of undermining the status of West Berlin or the role of the Western powers. In fact, it sometimes seemed to him that the Soviets held the status of West Berlin in greater regard than the Western powers, or at least some of them.

The fact that West Berlin did not belong to the FRG was known to all. This had been confirmed by the Secretary of State and spokesmen for the other Western Allies. The question, however, is what is the actual practice in West Berlin. Officials of the FRG carry out their activities in West Berlin. The Soviets have brought this fact to the attention of the Federal authorities who could not deny the special status of West Berlin. Given these activities, the situation there cannot be normal. Therefore, the question of terminating such activities in West Berlin arises. Any understanding on West Berlin must include what is not allowed in West Berlin. Bundestag meetings and other such activities run counter to Allied agreements of the past. The Soviets also invoke these agreements and no one can say that they do not respect them.

From this, Gromyko continued, it should not be concluded that the Soviets want to strangle West Berlin or harbor any pernicious intentions. The Soviets were aware that economic and other ties have come into being and are facts of life, but these are no reason to negate the special status of West Berlin. On the other hand, the Soviets were aware that there are questions that should be resolved. The Soviets were prepared to assist as far as the GDR is concerned to solve questions of transit and access, taking into account the interests of West Berlin and the FRG.

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Such in general terms is the Soviet position, Gromyko noted, and nothing in it affects legitimate interests stemming from past Allied agreements. The Soviets are certain that achievement of an understanding is in line with the legitimate issues of all concerned and the lessening of tensions. The Soviets had put forward certain concrete suggestions for consideration by the Ambassadors. He felt that these provided a basis for agreement that had been formulated with due regard for the existing situation and should be assessed on their merits.

The Secretary said we had been disappointed at the last meeting of the Ambassadors. We were anxious to reduce tensions in the city. We do not believe that the rights and responsibilities of the four should be altered. We hoped we would reduce tensions, but if one side tries to alter these rights and responsibilities an increase in tensions will result.

Ambassador Rush observed that the viability of West Berlin was an essential ingredient in the reduction of tension. This was necessarily related to close ties between the FRG and West Berlin. If these ties were destroyed, a source of conflict would arise.

Gromyko stated such general expressions did not clarify the issues. Economic ties were acceptable, but political ties were not. What does the political presence of the FRG in West Berlin have to do with viability? If the FRG stated, for example that the activities of official bodies should be continued there, would the Western powers take the position that such meetings should be held?

In view of the lateness of the hour, the Secretary suggested that further discussion of Berlin continue at the working dinner scheduled for October 19. Perhaps tensions could not be reduced in the Berlin area, he added. They had existed for a long time. We would soon know. The Soviet proposals of October 9 were full of difficulties for us.

