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The Kennedy–Khrushchev Vienna Summit (1961) in the perception of the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk and the Head of the USSR Department of the US and Canada, Anatoly Dobrynin

The incomplete three-year presidential term of John F. Kennedy was an exceptionally intense US-USSR confrontation. The contest took the form of proxy clashes and conflicts in various corners of the world and was a straightforward escalation of the Cold War. The Soviet-American rivalry of the JFK administration began with the Vienna Summit.

The article has two cardinal purposes. First, to briefly review the Vienna Summit and its outcomes from the 21st-century perspective to acquire a broader view of the meeting, which proved much more consequential than initially seemed. Second, to analyse the insider view of two officials behind the meeting – the head of the American Department of the Soviet Foreign Ministry, Anatoly Dobrynin and the United States Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. The analysis is based on the following research questions:

1. What were Dean Rusk's and Anatoly Dobrynin's perceptions of the events in the light of their memoirs?
2. According to their memoirs, how (un)influential were those politicians during events?
3. What were their roles in the events, as portrayed in their memoirs?
4. Are the two politicians' assessments concurrent with the official US and/or USSR's interpretations of the outcomes back then and nowadays? If so/not, why and to what extent?

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Before JFK, President Dwight Eisenhower applied his "New Look" policy to the dealings with the Soviets. In the nuclear age, reinforcement of the US atomic arsenals seemed the most effective way to deter communists from undertaking further steps against the so-called Free World. Atomic armament appeared cheaper than investments in conventional military branches[1]. In the political sphere, with Eisenhower's Secretaries of State John F. Dulles and Christian Herter, the US foreign policymaking was substantially ceded to the Department of State.

JFK, however, introduced dynamic changes to policy-making and the containment of the USSR. His visions of political decision-making and handling of the Soviets were discrepant with those of the previous executive. In decision-making, Kennedy preferred it to resemble a wheel, the spokes of which would lead to the – centrally located – President's office[2]. Among others, his approach was dictated by JFK's well-founded conviction that the Department of State was drowning in bureaucracy and indolence[3]. He did not believe the agency was able to serve its purposes efficiently. Hence, JFK started to bypass the Department of State in handling US foreign policy to an unprecedented extent[4].

Regarding the ability to cope with the USSR, Kennedy neither liked the idea of further bolstering the nuclear arsenal at the expense of conventional armed forces, nor trusted the safety and reliability of the former. He feared that an uncontrollable escalation of the nuclear arms race could lead to a nuclear war with no winner. Still, JFK's desire to avoid a nuclear conflict with the USSR did not mean he was lenient or non-confrontational in his approach to communism. Thus, JFK's adoption of a new strategy did not mean his resignation from the development of the US nuclear arsenals. On the contrary, President Kennedy wanted to strengthen the American armed forces in all aspects to achieve ultimate military superiority over the Soviets[5].

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John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev had not known each other before the Vienna Summit. On the 9th November 1960, the Soviet Prime Minister sent Kennedy a tele-

[1] Cf.: R.L. Beisner, *Dean Acheson: a life in the Cold War*, New York 2006, p. 630; R.A. Divine, *Kennedy and the Cold War*, [in:] *Safeguarding the republic: essays and documents in American foreign relations, 1890–1991*, ed. H. Jones, New York 1992, p. 211.

[2] D. Rusk, *As I saw it: a Secretary of State's memoirs by Dean Rusk*, London–New York 1991, pp. 265–270.

[3] T.J. Schoenbaum, *Waging peace & war: Dean Rusk in the Truman, Kennedy & Johnson years*, New York 1988, pp. 274–275. Cf.: *Affection and trust: the personal correspondence of Harry S. Truman and Dean Acheson, 1953–1971*, New York 2010, pp. 267–268.

[4] *Affection and trust…*

[5] The President's actions proved fruitful; between 1961 and 1964, the American nuclear arsenal grew by 50%. More so, the number of B52 strategic bombers carrying weapons doubled during the period. Moreover, the number of Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBM) rose from 63 to a staggering 424. Additionally, JFK ordered the program to build 23 new submarines able to carry 16 Polaris missiles each.

gram congratulating him on winning the presidential election and expressing his wish to bring the US-USSR relations to the level of the bond between Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt during World War II[6]. Khrushchev signalled he was interested in discussing issues concerning disarmament, the German peace treaty, and several other issues regarding the international situation[7]. In a letter of 22nd February 1961, the President stated he also wanted to meet the Soviet leader to exchange views informally[8].

The JFK initiative was massively against the opinion of his advisers. They feared that JFK was a novice to the US-Soviet rivalry and knew nothing of the Soviet decision-makers and their *modus operandi*[9]. JFK was also perceived as a politician relying too much on his charm and confidence, which – in the advisory staff's opinion – might not work with the Soviets[10]. Simultaneously, the discrepancy of views over the meeting within JFK's cabinet proves the Americans were not overly enthusiastic about starting a US-USSR political dialogue.

Khrushchev accepted the American offer to meet in Vienna, Austria, for a few rounds of talks on the 4th June 1961. Although the summit may have promised a warming of the strained relations, several Cold War in-progress hostilities and clashes continued from February to June 1961; also, some new ones emerged[11]. The Soviet-American rivalry became particularly intense and inflamed in the context of Berlin, Germany, Laos, and Cuba. Indeed, there was much to discuss in Vienna.

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In 1961, Berlin was divided into western and eastern occupational zones, like the rest of Germany. In 1949, Stalin inspired East German communists to create, out of the Soviet occupational zone, a puppet state known as the German Democratic Republic (GDR), a.k.a. East Germany[12]. As there was no formal border between the West and East Berlin zones back then, by 1961, approximately 3.5 million Germans had fled from the GDR to West Berlin (ca 20% of the approx. 18 million GDR's population)[13]. As the majority of

[6] Message from Chairman Khrushchev to President-elect Kennedy. American foreign policy: current documents, 1960, p. 476. No classification marking, DoA 24 Feb. 2021, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v06/d1 (accessed: 3.07.2025).

[7] Ibidem. Cf.: P. Johnson, *A history of the American people*, New York 1998, p. 857.

[8] Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev, Department of State, Presidential Correspondence: Lot 66 D 204. No classification marking, DoA 24 Feb 2021, https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1961-63v06/d7 (accessed: 3.07.2025). Cf.: A. Dobrynin, *In confidence: Moscow's ambassador to America's six Cold War presidents*, New York 1995, p. 43.

[9] P. Johnson, op. cit.

[10] Ibidem.

[11] R.H. Ferrell, op. cit., p. 667.

[12] D. Rusk, op. cit., pp. 190–192.

[13] Summary of reports given by refugees during the period September 28 – October 5, 1961; Bureau of European Affairs, Country Director for Germany: Records Relating to Berlin and East German Affairs, 1957–1968; Lot 70D4; General Records of the Department of State; Record Group 59, DoA 17 Feb. 2021, https://

the escapees were representatives of the German intelligentsia, e.g. doctors, architects, lawyers, teachers, architects, Walter Ulbricht, the General Secretary of the East German Communist Party, was worried that the practice would seriously depopulate communist Germany and impoverish its intellectual resources. Thus, he pressed hard with Khrushchev to close the East-West Berlin 'passage' to halt the emigration[14].

Yet, Khrushchev was not quick to follow Ulbricht's line; he feared that taking a hard stance in that respect would further destabilise East Germany and East Berlin. Khrushchev was seriously afraid of a dynamic military counteraction from the West[15]. Simultaneously, however, the Soviets started preparations to sign a separatist peace treaty with East Germany[16]. Should that happen, the situation would become most uncomfortable for the US; East Berlin would be controlled exclusively by the GDR authorities, and West Berlin would be separated from the West. The Americans would need to deal with Ulbricht regarding supplies and maintenance.

That way, the Soviets could impose cooperation with East Germany on the US; thus, they could make Washington acknowledge the secessionist Soviet-East German peace treaty. Therefore, President Truman and Eisenhower's attempts to divide Germany and Berlin to reduce Soviet influence were at serious risk. The US political prestige could be questioned if not effectively ruined. In the tense situation, the Vienna Summit could serve as a litmus paper for the Soviets to probe how far they could move, provoking the Americans.

Another point of concern was Laos. President Eisenhower left JFK with the necessity to continue American support for Laos's right-wing conservative royal government. The initiative was to counter the Soviet encouragement of the leftist Pathet Lao movement in its attempt to seize power in the country[17]. The Soviets – supporting the left-wing movement and the North Vietnamese guerrilla in its funding of Pathet Lao – incited a critical USSR-US conflict in the region. As both parties invested a lot to gain influence in Laos and put their diplomatic and military prestige at stake, a compromising agreement was urgently needed[18]. Intense and well-thought-out diplomatic steps were immediately required as the situation intensified the arms race. Finally, the American blunder concerning the Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba (17th–20th April 1961) and the fiasco of the pro-American coup against Fidel Castro further complicated the US-USSR relations.

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www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2011/fall/berlin (accessed: 3.07.2025). Cf.: T.C. Sorensen, *Kennedy*, New York 1988, p. 593.

[14] R.H. Ferrell, op. cit., p. 667.

[15] Khrushchev's secret speech on the Berlin crisis, August 1961, DoA 17 Feb. 2021, https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/khrush.htm (accessed: 3.07.2025).

[16] P. Matera, R. Materna, *Stany Zjednoczone i Europa. Stosunki polityczne i gospodarcze 1776–2004*, Warsaw 2007, p. 228.

[17] T.C. Sorensen, op. cit., p. 641.

[18] Ibidem, p. 642.

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Considering the above, Laos and Berlin became the primary concerns during the Summit. Khrushchev, who had experience with President Eisenhower, was eager to check how politically close the new American leader was to his predecessor[19].

President Kennedy was confident in his assets, which secured his presidential victory and popularity. Officially, the Vienna Summit had no official agenda and was supposed to be an informal exchange of ideas of preliminary character. Hence, no high hopes or conclusions were expected on the American part; still, the mood was optimistic[20]. Such an attitude – however – led to JFK's incomplete preparation for the faceoff with Khrushchev.

The Soviets treated the summit in a strikingly different manner. For the USSR, the meeting was yet another Cold War battle against the West. Kennedy's youth, charm and energy had no impact on Khrushchev. In contrast, owing to the traditional in Russia respect for old age within the hierarchy, acknowledgement of political competence and experience, and traditional adoration of authoritarian power, the Soviet leader perceived Kennedy as too young, arrogant, incompetent, weak, and confused a frontman, somehow accidentally put forward[21]. However, the Summit happened to be another occasion on which the Russians immensely underestimated the American ability to learn quickly and effectively from mistakes[22].

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From the beginning, Khrushchev wanted to intimidate the American leader[23]. He boldly communicated that a united Germany would threaten the Soviet Union, much as it had in the 1930s, and even more so then, considering West Germany had been a NATO member since 1955[24]. Therefore, Khrushchev insisted on unilaterally signing a separate peace treaty with the GDR if necessary. He claimed East German authorities should administer Berlin, and West Germany should remain within the Western sphere of influence[25].

JFK was shocked and disordered by the radical and insistent stance of the Soviets[26]. Still, the President shook off the initial surprise soon enough to principally assert that the American occupation of Berlin was contractual. Hence, evacuation would undermine the world's trust in America's commitment, which was out of the question, and JFK pointedly articulated that. Since JFK insisted on the United States military presence in the city,

[19] T.J. Schoenbaum, op. cit., p. 335.
[20] Ibidem, p. 333.
[21] R.A. Divine, op. cit., p. 212. Cf.: H. Kissinger, *Dyplomacja*, Warsaw 2002, p. 639.
[22] T.C. Sorensen, op. cit., p. 550.
[23] A. Dobrynin, op. cit., p. 44.
[24] T.J. Schoenbaum, op. cit., p. 335.
[25] Ibidem, p. 331.
[26] Ibidem, p. 336.

Khrushchev suggested an interim US-USSR agreement concerning Germany and Berlin. If not concluded, the Russian claimed, the USSR would sign a separatist treaty with the GDR, thus nullifying the previous Four Powers agreement[27].

The negotiations regarding Berlin and Germany ended inconclusively. The Soviets were determined to sign a peace treaty with communist East Germany, forcing the West to acknowledge the existence of the puppet country. Berlin was to remain divided, and the Americans were adamant about their military presence in the city[28].

Another round of talks concerned the conflict in Laos. There, Khrushchev demonstrated a more flexible approach, agreeing the conflict should be de-escalated[29]. The Americans insisted the Soviets stop supporting the North Vietnamese guerrillas in Laos and their aid to the Pathet Lao. As the arms race in that theatre was inconvenient for the Kremlin, a neutral and independent Laos was an acceptable solution to Khrushchev[30]. Although no official documents were signed in the above respect, a consensus was eventually reached in stormy Southeast Asia, and the phasedown of Laos – a process that lasted until 1962 – was initiated in Vienna.

Secretary Dean Rusk's perception of the Summit

Of the 580 pages of his memoirs, Secretary Rusk devoted a mere five pages (8% of the volume) to the Vienna Summit[31], illustrating how insignificant the meeting was for the Kennedy administration in his eyes. It also demonstrates how little Secretary Rusk had to say about that matter and how little he believed in that channel of diplomacy[32].

Simultaneously, from the historical perspective, Dean Rusk became the second longest-serving US Secretary of State[33]. He rose from a technical supporter and aide to Kennedy to a fully independent and influential advisor to President L.B. Johnson. Hence, his judgement and observations from the Summit did matter. Additionally, as he was beginning his political career in 1961, the Vienna talks must have considerably influenced his political views.

Slim in quantity as Rusk's comments may appear, the Secretary did provide quite several significant remarks of a broader nature. Indeed, the Vienna Summit provided Rusk, a novice Secretary of State with an understanding of how challenging it was for Americans to deal with the USSR.

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[27] T.C. Sorensen, op. cit., p. 548–550, 584.
[28] Ibidem.
[29] D. Rusk, op. cit., p. 193.
[30] Ibidem.
[31] Ibidem, p. 587.
[32] T.J. Schoenbaum, op. cit., p. 275.
[33] After Cordell Hull, the Secretary of State in F.D. Roosevelt's administrations 1933–1944.

> The Soviets are tough negotiators, extremely stubborn, persistent, and unyielding in their positions. We, Americans, are characteristically agreement-orientated and quick to strike deals. All this gives the Soviets a negotiating advantage. (…) Soviet positions can be utterly untenable, such as Khrushchev's outrageous ultimatum to Kennedy in Vienna (…)[34].

The meeting made Rusk realise there was a specific rule to Soviet bargaining. The realisation proved invaluable in subsequent talks. The Secretary noticed a pattern that Khrushchev applied in his dealings with the US president:

> There is a certain rhythm to negotiating with the Soviets. The talks seem to follow three stages. (…) One, they start off tough and demanding, hard as nails, and harshly ideological. Americans, always impatient and in a hurry to conclude agreements, are tempted to pick up their briefcases and go home. (…) Two, little hints or openings (…) appear, suggesting that progress might somehow be possible. With luck, we arrive at stage three, where the serious work of drafting an agreement begins. It takes patience, persistence, and a great deal of sensitivity to what you are hearing from Soviet negotiators to get anywhere with them. (…) They [the Soviets – M.B.] prefer that we [the Americans – M.B.] make the proposals so they can whack away at them[35].

As Soviet stances were, according to Rusk, utterly unpredictable, no expert could be labelled to negotiate with them[36].

The Berlin issue was not new to Rusk; he had worked on the Berlin Airlift in 1948 and realised the loophole was crucial for the GDR and the Soviets[37]. The Secretary claims he warned JFK of the potential pressures from the Soviets. Rusk was rightly afraid that the communists would like to test the new American president and make him acknowledge the existence of the GDR. According to the Secretary, the Berlin issue was logically a tool for the Soviets to heat the atmosphere[38].

Dean Rusk openly stated that the Berlin issue was a straightforward legacy of Truman's and Eisenhower's policies. However, previous US administrations were openly hostile to the USSR. Kennedy wanted to make his own decisions[39]; he seemed more conciliatory yet not obsequious. It was something the Soviets did not know about Kennedy; he wanted to pact but was more than ready for a potential confrontation[40].

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[34] Ibidem, p. 299.
[35] Ibidem, pp. 299–300.
[36] Ibidem, p. 299.
[37] Ibidem, pp. 120–121.
[38] Ibidem, p. 191.
[39] Ibidem.
[40] It is also reflected in A. Dobrynin's memoirs. Cf.: A. Dobrynin, op. cit., p. 45.

Considering the disastrous Bay of Pigs landing and the urgently strained situation in the Congo and Laos, the German matters appeared secondary and relatively stable; as Rusk wrote, "the German matters simmered"[41]. JFK and his advisory team, McGeorge Bundy, Robert McNamara and Dean Rusk, were preoccupied with other matters. The top decision-makers assumed they had more critical decisions on their heads, or so it seemed back then, than stabilising the status of Germany[42]. From the modern perspective, the decision was a genuine mistake. Neither the Congo nor the Bay of Pigs blunder proved to be as politically significant and consequential during the Cold War as did German matters.

According to Rusk, Berlin was vital mainly in the declarative sphere and image building, especially since Kennedy wanted to visit Europe and – ideally – meet Khrushchev. Interestingly, however, although Rusk did not like the idea of the summit, he claimed he did not openly communicate his opinion to the President[43]. It must have resulted from JFK's attempts to make his own political decisions.

Secretary Rusk's reluctance stemmed from his disbelief in summit diplomacy rather than his conviction that JFK was unready for the talks. There was too little preparation time and too much pressure on the US President; additionally – in Rusk's opinion – few effects usually followed such enterprises. According to Rusk, courteous meetings of the top leaders are acceptable; handshakes welcome and smiles well received. Nonetheless, in his view, the practical outcomes of such negotiations were close to none. Therefore, Rusk preferred the "old-school" extensive and quiet consultations[44]. At the beginning of their cooperation, JFK and Rusk had thoroughly explained and clarified the nature of their collaboration and both knew their positions, duties and prerogatives. Kennedy was the boss, and the Secretary did not object. Dean Rusk treated himself more as a technical administrator or facilitator to JFK rather than an independent policymaker[45].

In Rusk's opinion, none of the above arguments against the President's going to Vienna could appeal to John Kennedy – a person of achievement, young, dynamic and presenting the "I know better" attitude. As the Vienna Summit was not officially set on any agenda, it was, as Dean Rusk stated, "a sure prescription for disaster"[46].

The contrast between the public reception of JFK and Khrushchev in Vienna could not have been more striking. The former was enthusiastically greeted throughout the city. The Soviet leader was accompanied by grave silence and empty streets. In the Secretary's eyes, the reception of the Vienna inhabitants and particular hostility negatively disposed Khrushchev to the summit and affected the talks[47]. That excellently illustrates how criti-

41 Ibidem.
42 Ibidem.
43 Ibidem, pp. 193–194.
44 Ibidem, p. 192.
45 Ibidem, p. 184.
46 Ibidem.
47 T.J. Schoenbaum, op. cit., p. 335.

cally important the right choice of place and audience for summits is in international politics. Rusk claims Khrushchev referred to the President's young age and vitality numerous times, never in a complimentary manner[48].

Interestingly, the opening of the summit went in a way that later sparked controversy among American experts. As Rusk saw it, Khrushchev began with a tirade on the inevitability, irreversibility, and supremacy of communism to imminently replace capitalism. JFK did not put up the glove and, instead of counter-arguimg Khrushchev's points, suggested getting down to business. According to the Secretary, it was a proper thing to do, as all too much time is usually wasted on fruitless ideological deliberations during summits. However, George Kennan, the iconic American analyst, an expert on the Soviets and an architect of US policy towards them in Eisenhower's administration, allegedly claimed JFK should have gone for an ideological confrontation, at least to some extent[49]. Rusk saw JFK's decision as a down-to-earth task orientation; Kennan feared the Soviets might have felt ignored or assumed Kennedy was poorly prepared and dodged confrontation. Either case could be interpreted as a weakness[50].

In the eyes of the Secretary, once the leaders went on to the Laos matter, progress was within reach. Although no final commitments were made in Vienna, both parties laid the foundations for the demilitarisation of Laos in the following year. As for the issues of Berlin and Germany, the situation, moods and negotiations changed dramatically. In the German matters, the Russian leader came to Vienna prepared to push the US president to the extreme:

> At one point, Khrushchev told Kennedy: 'We are going to negotiate a new agreement with East Germany, and the access routes to Berlin will be under their control. If there is any effort by the West to interfere, there will be war"[51].

Shocked as both Rusk and Kennedy were, as diplomats usually avoid the word "war" at every expense, the US president proved composed and calm. It must have been tough, as virtually no one had expected such a radical Soviet stance. According to Rusk, JFK did put up the glove then:

> Kennedy went right back at him [Khrushchev – M.B.], looked him in the eye, and said, "Then, there will be war, Mr Chairman. It is going to be a very cold winter"[52].

[48] Ibidem.
[49] Ibidem.
[50] D. Rusk, op. cit., p. 192.
[51] T.J. Schoenbaum, op. cit., p. 335.
[52] D. Rusk, op. cit., p. 193.

Rusk was rightly convinced that Khrushchev had arrived in Vienna to intimidate, confuse, and press the new, young, inexperienced American president to the fullest. Nevertheless, Kennedy was neither that inexperienced nor soft enough to be easily overwhelmed or dominated by Khrushchev. In the Secretary's opinion, as brave as JFK was in the verbal duel with the Soviet leader, he "(…) for the first time felt the full weight of Soviet pressure and ideology. The meeting ended with the Soviet aide-memoire, setting the end of December 1961 as the deadline for the peace treaty"[53].

After the summit, Secretary Rusk claimed that no one in the US delegation wanted to concede anything to the Soviets. The difference applied to how to approach the matter. Dean Acheson[54] advised strengthening NATO's and the US' nuclear and conventional forces to demonstrate power. Adlai Stevenson[55] supported Acheson but simultaneously wanted a solution regarding Berlin's status. Rusk's opinion, supported by Robert McNamara and Henry Kissinger[56], was "(...) »talk the question to death«. I saw nothing that we could negotiate. We already had our Berlin policy (…) firm for fifteen years. It was the Russians who wanted a new policy"[57].

At heart, Rusk was sceptical about whether the Berlin case could be solved; still, he did not see it as a matter worth an open war. Rusk opted to pass the case to the United Nations[58]. Considering how ineffective the United Nations was in solving the US-USSR disputes, such a suggestion illustrates Rusk's disbelief that anything could/should be bargained for, and that Germany and Berlin were decided and "closed" cases. Rusk felt that the division of Berlin and Germany could effectively stabilise European matters for longer. Additionally, the Americans had developed a specific political strategy concerning Berlin and Germany, which they wanted to stick to. It proves that Washington was not willing to face Soviet demands. Kennedy was ready to withstand the personal pressure of Khrushchev and demonstrate the American will to supervise the occupational zones in Germany and divide Berlin in the declarative sphere. Still, when the Soviets decided to erect the Berlin Wall a mere two months later, Washington accepted it, dodging a military faceoff.

Anatoly Dobrynin's perception of the Summit

Anatoly Dobrynin's accounts and opinions seem exceptionally noteworthy. By 1961, that professional diplomat had gathered extensive diplomatic experience. Previously, he

[53] Ibidem.

[54] An ex-Secretary of State and – in the 1960s – a leading member of the Wise Men, a bipartisan establishment group.

[55] In JFK's times, the United States Ambassador to the United Nations.

[56] Back then, a rising star foreign policy advisor.

[57] Ibidem.

[58] Ibidem.

served as the United Nations Deputy Secretary (1957)[59]. In 1960, he was the head of the United States and the Canada Depratment in the Soviet Foreign Ministry. It was Dobrynin who set the details of the Vienna Summit with the Americans, participated in the meeting, and, from 1962, functioned as the USSR Ambassador to the US. His position and influence steadily strengthened since he was assigned the role of intermediary during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis[60]. His tenure until 1986 proves Dobrynin's adamant position within the Soviet decision-making elites, always unsteady and vulnerable. It makes his observations remarkably valuable and provides insight into the Soviet decision-making at that time. Notably, his memoirs were published in 1995, in the non-communist times in Russia. It gave the ex-ambassador more freedom to reveal his opinions and the background of Soviet policymaking at the height of the Cold War.

Directly before and during the Vienna Summit, Anatoly Dobrynin, although relatively young by Soviet standards – only 42 – was already the executive of the United States and Canada Department of the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Thus, although not holding the most eminent positions, he was one of the administrators of the meeting and a witness to Soviet politics toward the US at the time.

Similarly to Rusk's, Dobrynin's memoirs do not attach much importance to the summit (a mere 15 of 642 pages – 2,3% of the volume). The memoirs confirm that the meeting was a Soviet initiative. Dobrynin adds that the Americans responded swiftly (on 24 January 1961), suggesting the idea was attractive to Washington, too. Simultaneously, Dobrynin emphasises that owing to the leaders' quite discrepant reasons and purposes for the meeting, the summit was bound to be inconclusive[61].

The formula for the meeting was suggested by the US Ambassador to the USSR, Llewelyn Thompson[62]. The fact that the parties soon agreed on the summit's format, location, and date proves that both the US and the USSR were vitally interested. Washington signalled the need to discuss the case of Laos and consider a nuclear test ban treaty. However, in Dobrynin's view, the Americans primarily wanted to sound why the Soviets pressed so hard on the issues of Berlin and Germany. He concluded that the Americans wanted to check if Moscow was ready to go to war over either[63].

The American uncertainty on the above is startling; historically, German matters had always been paramount for Russia. Lenin organised and carried out the Bolshevik revolution with German money. Due to the fundamentally different German and Russian ideologies and political concepts, both world wars produced their outcomes. None of those was reflected in Rusk's memoirs, which is somehow comprehensible; the Secretary

[59] Ibidem, pp. 33–35.
[60] A. Dobrynin, op. cit., pp. 113–114.
[61] Ibidem.
[62] L. Thompson's note from 9 March 1961 – A. Dobrynin, op. cit., p. 43.
[63] Ibidem.

proved in his writing that Washington policymakers applied the American perspective in dealing with the Soviets. However, Dobrynin's lack of mention of long-lasting and deep-rooted reasons for Soviet sensitivity to German issues surprises to the greatest extent. Alternatively, the case may have seemed so evident to the Russian diplomat that he assumed it self-explanatory.

Still, Dobrynin provides an exciting account of the balance of powers within the Politburo, the Soviet managing board. It was a gathering of politicians largely ignorant of Kennedy, European, and American matters and the proper balance of power. Also, Nikita Khrushchev's political position seemed unquestionably stable and powerful, which was to change drastically over the next two years[64].

In Dobrynin's opinion, the cardinal purpose of Khrushchev's going to Vienna was to test, press and humiliate the US leader. Khrushchev thought he had good reasons to expect such an outcome of the meeting, as even among his advisory team, Kennedy had a reputation as a diplomatic dabbler:

> Khrushchev wished to measure the resolve of this young, new president who, even in his own country, still retained something of a reputation, deserved or not, as a political dilettante[65].

Ten days before the summit, the Politburo held a special session to establish the official Soviet stance for the meeting. All the members of the Politburo and the Soviet delegates to Vienna were present, including Dobrynin. Paradoxically, during the council, the most competent and experienced in dealing with the West politician and counsellor of the Soviet delegation to Vienna, i.e. Anatoly Dobrynin, was neither asked anything nor consulted nor allowed to speak [sic!]. It proves how insignificant his influence on the final shape of the meeting was and how fragile his position within the Soviet politics of the time was[66].

The memoirs suggest that Nikita Khrushchev was the sole architect of the plan for the Vienna Summit. He announced to the board that he would press on JFK to the full regarding Berlin and Germany. The bold and straightforward preliminary declaration of the Soviet leader proves how differently the USSR and the US saw their foreign policy priorities in 1961. For the US, it was the Laos situation and the test ban treaty; for the Soviets, it was Europe, specifically the status of Berlin and Germany[67]. However, lacking any explanations concerning the historical na-

[64] Ibidem, p. 44.
[65] Ibidem.
[66] Ibidem.
[67] Ibidem.

ture of the Soviet engagement in German matters, Dobrynin portrayed Khrushchev as a politician obsessed with his own particular political visions. Actually, the Soviet leader continued the mainstream politics of Russia/Soviet Union towards Germany as it had been for at least fifty years.

According to Dobrynin, Khrushchev's plan was defective; it was based on "(…) an erroneous postulate that under the pressure of the Soviet troops in Europe, the young and inexperienced president could be made to concede, in particular on Berlin"[68]. From the modern perspective, it seems wishful thinking; the Soviets knew the condition of both rivals' armies, arsenals, and economies. Therefore, Khrushchev's assumption was barely reasonable. Also, the Soviets did not know anything about Kennedy; thus, an *a priori* assumption that he would be easy and lenient in negotiations was risky and reckless, to say the least. Nonetheless, assuming the Soviet stance was a continuum of the Russian *raison d'etat*, the policy of accomplis should not surprise as it was a typical solution the Russians applied throughout the Cold War and beyond[69].

According to A. Dobrynin, the fact that the whole Politburo supported the above tactic illustrates how incompetent and inexperienced the Soviet decision-makers were. They assumed that Khrushchev's experience in his contacts with President Eisenhower and Vice President Nixon provided him with enough credentials to handle JFK effectively and accomplish his political plans[70].

During the Politburo meeting, only Anastas Mikoyan, the Soviet Deputy Prime Minister, voiced his concerns. He lobbied for a new deal and constructive dialogue with a new president. Mikoyan warned that the Soviets would be highly uncomfortable if Kennedy proved a tough and skilful negotiator, as Khrushchev did not leave any possibility to concede. As nobody could guarantee that it was impossible, the Soviets could experience losing face – something they had always been overly sensitive about[71]. Still supported by no one, Mikoyan had to withdraw and agree to the leader's plan[72].

Curiously, after the council, in an off-record conversation with Andrei Gromyko, the Soviet Foreign Minister, Dobrynin told him he supported Mikoyan's concerns and shared them with him. Although the minister did not want to discuss the case, Dobrynin "(...) got the feeling that [A. Gromyko – M.B.] had doubts of his own about Khrushchev's course"[73]. The situation proves the authoritative conduct of Khrushchev and the indecision and lack of skill of the Politburo in actual policymaking. Even if more members were

[68] Ibidem.

[69] The most glaring current examples are Putin's Russia invasion of Ukraine in 2014 and 2022.

[70] Ibidem.

[71] Having accepted Khrushchev's plan, the Soviet government soon led to the loss of face – during the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

[72] A. Dobrynin, op. cit., p. 44.

[73] Ibidem.

critical of Khrushchev's initiative, the nature of the system and the leader's position made it impossible to influence the plan.

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Interestingly, Dobrynin accounts for the beginning of the Summit differently from Dean Rusk. According to the Russian diplomat, the most prominent issue was the part in which JFK and Khrushchev discussed the ideological principles of the East and West. The President suggested that the Soviets spread communism wherever they could, and Khrushchev stated he was against the export of revolution, but simultaneously, he objected to the export of counterrevolution[74]. It was to suggest that Americans were doing the same as the Soviets, and JFK should neither make it an accusation against Moscow nor feel morally superior[75].

The Dobrynin accounts contradict D. Rusk's claim that JFK did not stand up to Khrushchev on ideological grounds. Dobrynin's account suggests that Kennedy did what G. Kennan advocated – a balanced, well-timed exchange to demonstrate interest, respect and preparedness. Dobrynin emphasises the will to negotiate on the part of the American president. JFK claimed that the established balance of power between the Sino-Soviet block and the US and its Western satellites was right, and there was no need to challenge it. However, Khrushchev, consequently, stuck to his blackmail concerning Berlin. Dobrynin claims that the extort went as far as to openly suggest a military West-East clash if the US did not take swift, favourable for the Soviets, action regarding Berlin, which confirms Rusk's accounts[76].

However, from the beginning, Khrushchev should have understood that JFK was not exactly the type of politician the Soviet leader had expected him to be, that is, hesitant, naïve, and lenient. Kennedy did admit that the status of the city was unnatural, yet he refused to concede and, again, appealed to maintain the *status quo*[77].

According to Dobrynin, Khrushchev's aggressive and arrogant conduct was, in equal proportions, a result of his zeal to achieve his political objectives and the flaws of his character, i.e., impulsiveness, impatience, and bossism[78]. Therefore, he could not give up his forceful manner, which effectively clouded his assessment of reality and the actual state of the matter. Thus, from the start, his plans seemed fantasy rather than a productive means to win something with the Americans. On the other hand, having negotiated with Eisenhower and Nixon in the previous years, Khrushchev

[74] Ibidem.
[75] Ibidem.
[76] Ibidem, p. 45.
[77] Ibidem, p. 44.
[78] Ibidem, p. 45.

knew the Americans did not understand the significance of Germany for the USSR and could reasonably hope for their relative lenience in that respect. Nonetheless, threatening the US with war was a tremendously dangerous gamble. And that, from a historical perspective, proved Khrushchev's biggest mistake.

The Soviet threat to resort to a military solution proves the above. Dobrynin openly stated that there had been no single say concerning military solutions during the Politburo council preparations for the summit:

> When all these questions were being discussed [of Berlin and Germany – M.B.] at the meetings of the *Politburo*, no one even thought of the possibility of a military confrontation with the United States. That was absolutely excluded from our plans. (…) Khrushchev actually feared a new war[79].

Hardly is it believable that such a gravely serious and ultimate measure could have been omitted or overlooked in the Soviet preparations. Also, it seems unlikely that the Politburo members trusted and respected Khrushchev to the extent that they would hand over all the decision-making in potentially waging war to him. Dobrynin was convinced that the Soviet leader was bluffing; curiously, however, for entirely unknown reasons. It appears even less rational, as, according to Dobrynin – Khrushchev feared a military confrontation.

> Khrushchev was obviously bluffing, and whether consciously or because of his emotional makeup, it is still hard to say. (…) Khrushchev never considered a possibility of one [war – M. B.] waged over Germany or other international disputes[80].

Indeed, he had a good reason for avoiding the conflict; if so, why, in Vienna, did he seem ready to push it to the brink of war?

Miraculously, unreasonable as such a bluff was, it worked, still not to Khrushchev's anticipated ends. As Kennedy did not see through the bluff, it complicated and strained the USSR-US relations until 1971, i.e. for the whole decade[81]. Also, for JFK did take Khrushchev seriously, he intensified war preparations and his presidential followers until

[79] Ibidem.

[80] Ibidem.

[81] The parties signed an Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War (30th September 1971). It provided for nuclear safeguards, immediate notification of an unexplained atomic detonation, and advance notice of missile launches. Also, improvements to the hotline were agreed upon. Cf.: Agreement on Measures to Reduce the Risk of Outbreak of Nuclear War Between The United States of America and The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Accidents Measures Agreement), U.S. Department of State, Diplomacy in Action, DoA 29 Feb. 2024, https://2009-2017.state.gov/t/isn/4692.htm (accessed: 3.07.2025).

Ronald Reagan stuck to the eventuality of war with the Soviets, which ultimately led to the collapse of the USSR[82].

The above issues and strained atmosphere could easily make or break the summit. It was the flexibility and patience of the Americans that made it. The leaders could move to more constructive topics once the most challenging and sore point was inconclusively discussed. That phase went smoothly, as Moscow was interested in alleviating the situation in Laos in the context the China-USSR rivalry in Southeast Asia and the potential test ban treaty. Interestingly, neither of the two topics engaged Khrushchev too much. Dobrynin barely mentions them once during the preparation and negotiation phases[83].

The readiness to compromise on Laos and the openness for further talks on the test ban treaty prove Khrushchev's insincerity; the Soviets did not plan to stabilise Southeast Asia, as evidenced by Moscow's involvement in Vietnam. As for the reduction of nuclear armaments, they were only interested in them because, technologically and economically, they were unable to match the American nuclear arsenals. Had it been otherwise, Dobrynin's account of Soviet political decision-making suggests that no compromise would have been possible. Thus, the compromise rested on the premises, which – on the Soviet part – were far from genuine, which the nearest future of Vietnam was to demonstrate.

In the opinion of Anatoly Dobrynin, the meeting was much more significant than it appeared back then and there. Khrushchev significantly underestimated Kennedy, and that was his failure and mistake. However, JFK entirely overestimated Khrushchev's determination and his actual abilities. Therefore, the fate of Europe, the status of Germany, and the situation of Berlin developed as they did later. Had the Americans evaluated the power and influence of the USSR more accurately, the fates of the Cold War and its length and development could have been entirely different, i.e., much more favourable for the US and the West[84].

Conclusions

Considering the above analysis, two sets of inferences emerge. One is more general, applying to the objective significance and value of the Vienna Summit. The other is more subjective, recapitulating the observations and inferences of Secretary Dean Rusk and Counsellor Anatoly Dobrynin.

Essentially, the decisions made and arrangements decided upon during the Vienna Summit were informal and nonbinding for the parties; therefore, nothing took the form of any written agreement or even declaration. That was a perfect solution for the

[82] The culmination of the American policy in that respect was the October 1986 Reykjavik Summit, attended by Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev.

[83] Ibidem, pp. 43, 46.

[84] Ibidem, p. 46.

non-genuine Soviet delegation; they could always withdraw or deny the accords if matters took an unfavourable course. Therefore, assessing the outcome of the meeting is not as easy and conventional as it may seem, as it cannot be based on hard evidence, i.e., documents.

First, both leaders treated the meeting in entirely different ways. For John F. Kennedy, the summit was a preliminary, purely technical, political reconnaissance. For Nikita Khrushchev, the meeting was another intense, challenging ideological encounter to be won against a hostile capitalist regime. Thus, the American leader came underprepared for what the Soviets held for him. However, the Soviet leader attached too much value to the potential benefits of the summit and his apparent achievements led to Soviet failure from a broader perspective.

The above discrepant outcome stemmed from yet another difference in perceptions of the main theatres of the Cold War in Washington and Moscow. The former focused primarily on Central America and Southeast Asia during the period; the latter concentrated on European issues, particularly the status of Germany and Berlin. Historically, American policymakers made a considerable mistake in their estimates. They applied the North American perspective on world issues to combating the USSR; they should have tried to perceive things from the Soviet standpoint instead. Then JFK would have realised how vital Germany and Berlin were for Moscow and how insignificant the Bay of Pigs landing and the Laos crisis appeared.

Khrushchev's original plan to intimidate and humiliate Kennedy did not work at all and could not. Had the Soviets known that JFK was bred by his father, Joseph Kennedy, to be a leader and commander, they would never have tried to act as Khrushchev did. Kennedy had no complexes, experienced war dangers in WWII, demonstrated courage on the battlefield, had political connections and family influences; he was hardly ever refused favours, and was successful in his private life. Those, combined with his firm, dominant personality, narcissism, and personal machismo, made him no target for intimidation attempts.

Indeed, Khrushchev's aggressive and brutal conduct shocked the President; however, he immediately and effectively handled Khrushchev on a personal level. At the same time, however, JFK treated Khrushchev all too seriously and attributed more power to him than the Soviet leader actually had. Such an attitude had adverse outcomes but appeared to be a good school of hard kicks for the US president.

Seemingly, Khrushchev's most outstanding achievement was successful bluffing in Vienna. However, the consequence of his bluff was entirely unanticipated and eventually proved lethal to the USSR. Khrushchev waged war as a deterrent, almost a bugaboo. The result was that Kennedy treated the threat seriously and started preparing the US for an eventual military confrontation with the USSR. The outcome must have been evident in

a longer perspective: the collapse and decomposition of the malfunctioning and failing Soviet state in 1991.

On the other hand, had JFK seen through Khrushchev's bluff, the Americans would certainly not have allowed the erection of the Berlin Wall the same year, would have pressed the Soviets harder in the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Cold War could have ended sooner and in a more evident defeat of Soviet communism. From that angle, events like the Prague Spring of 1968, the Polish events of the 1970s, and the war in Afghanistan of 1979 would not have to happen.

In Vienna, the Americans were preoccupied with the issues of the Bay of Pigs landing howler and the destabilisation of Laos. During the summit, they failed at both ends; the former proved utterly unimportant, and the latter short-lived in the perspective of the Vietnam War looming ahead[85]. The Soviets paid no attention to either of the American points of concern. That proves how much American-centric the Washington perception of the Cold War was then. Additionally, the Soviets were not genuine in their declarations concerning Laos or Southeast Asia in general. It is yet another piece of evidence of how little the American administrations knew or understood the Soviets and how mistakenly they applied American political standards to communist policymaking. Consequently, the Vienna Summit did not open the eyes of Washington politicians to the Soviets, their agenda, objectives, and *modus operandi*. That was to take a severe toll in the 1960s and 1970s.

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Dean Rusk's and Anatoly Dobrynin's perceptions of the Summit share several intriguing analogies and striking differences. Rusk and Dobrynin's statuses were remarkably similar in 1961; they were just starting their impressive political careers. Although both were insignificant in their respective administrations back then, they were already competent and experienced.

Curiously, their status during the Summit is quite similar, too; they are both of secondary importance, more technical than strategic diplomats; their presence is crucial for the functioning of the delegations in Vienna, yet their impact on the talks or their leaders is close to none. It was a pity, as Rusk and Dobrynin were better versed, more expert, and more realistic in their assessment than their superiors. If either JFK or Khrushchev had listened to Rusk or Dobrynin more attentively and followed their advice, the advantages and benefits would be incomparably more spectacular. They proved their merits later as independent and decisive politicians (Rusk in L.B. Johnson's cabinet) and the USSR Ambassador to Washington until 1986 (Dobrynin).

[85] Suffice to say A. Dobrynin, in his memoirs, refers to the landing and Laos once, describing preparations for the summit. Cf. A. Dobrynin, op. cit., p. 43.

The memoirs of both diplomats complement each other and shed attractive light on various aspects of the Summit. Nevertheless, they contain certain discrepancies and contradictions, which make their analysis even more informative and valuable. Simultaneously, they prove and illustrate the different perspectives of the contending parties during the Summit.

However, Rusk and Dobrynin agree that the Vienna Summit was bound to be inconclusive for varied reasons. The US Secretary of State wholeheartedly disbelieved in summit diplomacy's, and he instilled the view in the President. Khrushchev dominated the Soviet delegation, and his futile and dangerous idea was to wage war to pressure the Americans. With such fixed mindsets of decision-makers, no constructive output was feasible.

D. Rusk's memoirs reveal that the Americans did not expect much from the summit, contrary to Khrushchev, who had high hopes of coercing Washington into their ways in the Germany and Berlin cases. The Soviets did achieve most of their agenda, but the Americans wasted a precious opportunity to gain an advantage over the Soviets.

According to Dobrynin, the summit was much more meaningful than it seemed at the time. He openly claimed that Khrushchev bluffed regarding Berlin and Germany. Much as he hoped for a positive outcome of the trick, he vastly miscalculated. The Soviets waged war while they did not really mean it; the Americans took the threat seriously and started full-scale preparation to – if necessary – defeat the USSR in a military clash. From a longer perspective, it led to a severe collapse of the Soviet system during Ronald Reagan's presidency and the final breakdown of the Soviet bloc and the USSR itself.

The above was determined by Khrushchev's inconsiderate and thoughtless rhetoric, his disastrously poor wording, and his lack of composure. Rusk correctly concluded that the Soviet leader came to Vienna convinced he had all the assets and allowed himself the liberty to be arrogant and appear omnipotent, which he clearly was not. In such a mood, he uttered the word "war" as a threat. From then on, there was no retreat; Kennedy needed to consider war as an eventuality, and so he did.

From Dean Rusk's memoirs, it is clear that, by 1961, Washington had already drafted its policy toward Berlin and Germany. The Yalta conference provisions were assumed obligatory, and Rusk supported sticking to them. Unfortunately, the Soviets wanted their new politics in the area; alas, not seeing through Khrushchev's bluff, Kennedy let the Soviets introduce their way. Dobrynin clearly indicates that, owing to the Soviet realisation that Germany and Berlin were not the US political priorities, Khrushchev could erect the Berlin Wall with impunity and, practically, unopposed. Rusk's conclusions confirm it.

Thus, the Vienna Summit could have brought the US many more benefits if treated more importantly; however, the American delegation essentially wasted the opportunity due to faulty prioritising. Simultaneously, the Soviets hugely overdid their demands and

inflated expectations. Much as Washington underrated the Summit's potential, Moscow overrated it as well as their position in the negotiations. That led to a very short-range and apparent success, namely the division of Germany and Berlin. Overall, Khrushchev's Pyrrhic victory in that respect cost the USSR the loss of the Cold War and the collapse of communism in a mere three decades.

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The Kennedy–Khrushchev Vienna Summit (1961) in the perception of the US Secretary of State, Dean Rusk and the Head of the USSR Department of the US and Canada, Anatoly Dobrynin

Summary: J.F. Kennedy's presidency witnessed a series of confrontations between the USA and the USSR, which began during the Vienna Summit. Nikita Khrushchev saw JFK as a political dilettante and was hoping to test the American President during negotiations. The Vienna summit did not bring any meaningful results because the meeting was informal and the delegates had completely different goals. Khrushchev focused on the German Democratic Republic and the division of Berlin, whereas JFK was more concerned with the crisis in Laos and the nuclear test ban treaty. Kennedy did not yield under pressure from Khrushchev, but overestimated the Soviet leader's threats of war. Khrushchev's strategy backfired because Soviet threats intensified America's preparations for war on a scale that – by 1988 – had bankrupted the USSR. From a historical perspective, America's priorities were misplaced because the Cold War came to an end in Europe, and the compromise regarding Laos and the nuclear treaty proved to be short-lived. Before the Vienna summit, the USA had approved the Yalta agreements and was unwilling to change the existing balance of power in Europe. The memoirs of the US Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Soviet delegation adviser Anatoly Dobrynin confirm these observations. Their accounts differ with regard to the meeting agenda and the progress made in the negotiations. Rusk and Dobrynin were highly competent and skilled diplomats, but they did not play a major role during the summit. Both delegations would have been well-served by more extensive consultations between their respective leaders and advisors. The analysis of the diplomats' memoirs provides valuable insights into JFK's and Khrushchev's decision-making styles. The memoirs prove that individuals play a crucial role in politics and that their decisions can have a profound impact on global affairs.

Keywords: Germany, Berlin, Laos, Cold War, diplomacy, summit, international crisis.

Wiener Gipfeltreffen Kennedy–Chruschtschow (1961) in der Wahrnehmung des US-Außenministers Dean Rusk und des Leiters der UdSSR-Abteilung für die USA und Kanada Anatoli Dobrynin

Zusammenfassung: Die Präsidentschaft von J. F. Kennedy war eine Zeit der Konfrontation zwischen den USA und der UdSSR, deren Beginn der Wiener Gipfel markierte. Nikita Chruschtschow betrachtete JFK als politischen Amateur und wollte den Präsidenten in Verhandlungen auf die Probe stellen. Das Treffen brachte aufgrund der völlig unterschiedlichen Ziele der Delegationen und des informellen Charakters des Treffens keine Lösungen hervor. Chruschtschow warb für die DDR und die Teilung Berlins. Für JFK waren die Laos-Krise und der Vertrag über das Verbot von Atomtests wichtig. Kennedy hielt Chruschtschows Druck stand, überschätzte jedoch dessen Kriegsdrohungen. Dies schlug auf die UdSSR zurück, da ihre Drohungen die amerikanischen Kriegsvorbereitungen in einem Ausmaß intensivierten, das die UdSSR 1988 in den Bankrott führte. Abkommen von Jalta akzeptiert und waren nicht bereit, das bestehende Machverhältnis in Europa zu ändern. Diese Beobachtungen spiegeln sich in den Memoiren des

US-Außenministers Dean Rusk und des sowjetischen Delegationsberaters Anatoli Dobrynin wider. Ihre Berichte unterscheiden sich in Bezug auf die Reihenfolge der Themen und den Verlauf der Verhandlungen. Obwohl Rusk und Dobrynin kompetent und erfahren waren, spielten sie während des Gipfels keine große Rolle; eine umfassendere Absprache zwischen den Staats- und Regierungschefs und beiden Beratern wäre für jede Delegation vorteilhafter gewesen. Der größte Nutzen der Analyse der Memoiren beider Diplomaten besteht darin, dass man einen Einblick in die Entscheidungsprozesse von JFK und Chruschtschow erhält. Sie zeigen, welch große Rolle Einzelpersonen in der Politik spielen und wie viel Einfluss ihre Entscheidungen haben können.

Schlüsselwörter: Deutschland, Berlin, Laos, Kalter Krieg, Diplomatie, Gipfel, internationale Krise

Szczyt Kennedy–Chruszczow w Wiedniu (1961) w opinii sekretarza stanu USA Deana Ruska i szefa Departamentu ZSRR ds. USA i Kanady Anatolija Dobrynina

Streszczenie: Prezydentura J.F. Kennedy'ego była pasmem konfrontacji między USA i ZSRR, a szczyt w Wiedniu 1961 r. był ich początkiem. N. Chruszczow postrzegał prezydenta USA jak dyletanta politycznego i chciał przetestować go w negocjacjach. Spotkanie nie przyniosło żadnych rozstrzygnięć ze względu na całkowicie rozbieżne cele obu delegacji i nieformalny charakter spotkania. Chruszczow promował NRD i podział Berlina. Dla JFK ważny był kryzys w Laosie i porozumienie dotyczące zakazu testów nuklearnych. Kennedy wytrzymał presję Chruszczowa, ale przecenił jego groźby wojenne. Obróciło się to przeciwko ZSRR, gdyż zintensyfikowały to amerykańskie przygotowania wojenne na skalę, która – do 1988 r. – doprowadziła ZSRR do bankructwa. Z perspektywy historycznej ówczesne priorytety USA wydają się błędne, ponieważ finał Zimnej Wojny nastąpił w Europie, a ustalenia dotyczące kompromisu w sprawie Laosu i porozumienia nuklearnego okazały się krótkotrwałe. Do szczytu w Wiedniu USA zaaprobowały ustalenia jałtańskie i nie były chętne do zmiany dotychczasowego układu sił w Europie. Powyższe spostrzeżenia znajdują odzwierciedlenie we wspomnieniach Sekretarza Stanu Deana Ruska i doradcy delegacji sowieckiej Anatolija Dobrynina. Ich relacje są odmienne pod względem kolejności tematów i rozwoju negocjacji. Chociaż kompetentni i doświadczeni Rusk i Dobrynin nie odegrali większej roli podczas szczytu; szersza konsultacja liderów z obydwoma doradcami przyniosłaby więcej pożytku każdej z delegacji. Najcenniejszą korzyścią z analizy wspomnień obu dyplomatów jest uzyskanie wglądu w procesy decyzyjne JFK i Chruszczowa. Dowodzą one tego, jak wielka jest rola jednostek w polityce i jak wielki wpływ mogą mieć ich decyzje.

Słowa kluczowe: Niemcy, Berlin, Laos, Zimna Wojna, dyplomacja, szczyt, kryzys międzynarodowy