5-1-1959

The Problem in Germany

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SPEECH OF SENATOR MIKE MANSFIELD (D., MONTANA)

To Be Delivered at the

Bicentennial World Affairs Forum of the
Foreign Policy Association

To be Held at the
Hotel Penn Sheraton
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
May 1, 1959

FOR RELEASE MAY 2, 1959 (A.M.'s)
Thank you for your kind words of introduction. They are deeply appreciated though undeserved.

Ladies and Gentlemen, your welcome has been warm and generous and I shall do my best not to wear it thin. As you know this is my second visit with the Foreign Policy Association of Pittsburgh. To have been asked to come again is both a pleasure and a reassurance. It is a little like being re-elected to the Senate. I am honored and I am most grateful to you, as I am to the citizens of Montana, for giving me a second chance.

Before proceeding to my remarks for this evening, I want to express to you, to your hardworking and able director (Mr. Higgins) and, in truth, to all the foreign policy associations throughout the country, my admiration for the very significant public service which you perform.

There was a time when the nation faced the problem of getting adequate and prompt information on developments elsewhere in the world. That problem has largely been solved. Modern means of communication bring the people of the United States, just as soon as it is made, almost more news than they can handle.

A related problem, however, remains. It is illustrated by a New York Times nationwide survey of public attitudes on the Berlin situation. The survey, made several weeks ago, showed that while an overwhelming percentage of Americans favored "standing firm" in the Berlin situation almost 40% did
did not know that in standing firm in Berlin we were standing over a hundred miles inside Communist Germany.

This suggests to me that while the problem of supplying the news from abroad in sufficient quantity is being met, the problem of filling in the background and of giving the news perspective in terms of the nation's needs and interests has not yet been adequately met. It is precisely in this field that the work of the foreign policy association is most useful. As a Member of the Senate and the Committee on Foreign Relations, I applaud you for your contribution to public understanding of the vital international issues which confront the nation. I express the hope that you will go on doing even more in this connection.

I am here, tonight, to participate with you in a small way in your important work. I am here to discuss one segment of the international situation—the question of Germany.

At this point in the unfolding of that question I believe it is reasonable to say that as a nation, we know that there is such a thing as a problem in Germany. Further, that we realize that we must "stand firm" in Germany. More recently, we have heard too of the need for not only "firmness" but also "flexibility". Let me try, tonight, to go beyond those slogans, for, in truth, that is what they are. Let me try, tonight, not merely to reiterate the need of being firm or flexible or firmly flexible or flexibly firm. Rather, let me try to explore with you the problem which confronts us in Germany and the possibilities of dealing with it in ways other than disastrous war or disastrous diplomatic retreat.
The problem which confronts us in Germany is a segment of the world-wide problem of establishing equitable, rational and evolving, conditions of peace. Today the crisis looms in a divided Germany and a divided Berlin. Tomorrow the scene of principal danger may shift to the Middle East. The day after it could be in the Far East that the clouds of conflict gather.

Since the end of the second war we have lived with a succession of international crises in these and other regions of the globe. It is as though the world were a vast and dangerous mine. We have rushed from one point of imminent or actual cave-in to another in a never-ending struggle to shore up the sagging roof of peace. We have timbered with a Berlin airlift, with a military defense of South Korea, with vast aid-programs in Europe, Asia and elsewhere, with troops in Lebanon and with naval power and other measures in the Formosan Straits.

These costly and strenuous improvisations represent our efforts to prevent a complete collapse of peace. It is doubtful, however, that what these measures have produced in the principal zones of danger—in Germany and Central Europe, in the Middle East and in Asia—this patchwork of timbering on which the fate of civilization rests—would meet a minimum safety code. The fact is that a dangerous world, no less than a dangerous mine, is not made safer, in any permanent sense, by patchwork. Improvisations may be unavoidable, as interim measures, as desperate measures. They ought not to be confused,
however, with peace. On the contrary, improvisations may conceal an encroaching danger to ourselves and to the rest of the world by creating the illusion of stability, by permitting the postponement of essential, fundamental changes until it becomes perilously late to make them.

Something of that sort, I believe, lies at the root of the present problem in Germany. For years now, there has existed in that nation a kind of surface stability.

This is the appearance of that stability. In Western Germany which houses about 50 million Germans, the responsible, representative government of the Federal Republic, its capital in the city of Bonn, functions with a high degree of effectiveness. West Germany has one of the most productive and dynamic industrial economies in the world. It also has the substantial beginnings of a powerful German military establishment. Beside this establishment, there are garrisoned over 275,000 other NATO troops--French, British and American--many with their dependents.

To the East of the Federal Republic is a communist-held German territory, much smaller in area and with a population of only 17 millions. Many Germans regard this region not as East Germany but as Central Germany, having in mind the Polish-annexed territories beyond the Oder-Neisse as the true, the unredeemed East. For our purposes tonight, however, I shall speak of the region as East Germany or Communist Germany. In this sector of the divided nation, there is poverty, stagnation and
oppression from which vast numbers have fled to the West in recent years. Increasingly, however, we hear reports of plans, if not the beginning, of an economic revival in the East.

There is communist rule in Eastern Germany. A German totalitarian regime exists there by virtue of its own and Soviet power and the acquiescence, however sullen, of the East German people. As in the West, a German military establishment has been reconstituted in the East, under communist control. It is supplemented by many divisions of Soviet Russian troops.

This brief sketch of a divided Germany also fits in microcosm, with some variations, the present situation in a divided Berlin. A principal difference is that Allied and Soviet Russian forces still retain tangible, visible responsibility for what happens, respectively, in the Western and Eastern sectors of the city. Garrisons of both are present and the Russians control the routes through East Germany over which French, British and American forces must pass, from their bases in West Germany to their outpost in Berlin.

Under the ultimate control of the Allies, West Berlin has its own municipal government with Willie Brandt as its able, outspoken Mayor. Under Soviet control, a sector of East Berlin--Pankow--serves as the seat of the Communist East German regime.

Among Germans of the two zones of the divided nation and the two parts of Berlin there is a considerable contact, official and unofficial, in trade and in other matters. There is no formal recognition, however, of the one by the other. In
fact, of all the principal countries involved in the German situation only the Soviet Union recognizes both the West and East German governments.

That, in brief, is the look of stability in Germany. The arrangements which underpin this stability are those which evolved at the end of World War II. They were designed originally for the temporary occupation of a defeated Germany. But what began as an expedient took on a kind of permanence with the breakdown in relations between the Soviet Union and the Western nations.

All around the rim of Germany changes have taken place. Within West Germany and East Germany, respectively, changes have also taken place. But between the divisions, the arrangements for stability have not changed in essentials for years.

All of the nations involved have recognized at one time or another that these arrangements are inadequate. We and other Western nations have said, in effect, that they must be changed. The Soviet Union has admitted that they should be changed. The German leaders--East and West--know that sooner or later they will be changed. All involved have paid at least lip service to the basic requirements of change, that is, to the need for reunification of Germany and of its capital of Berlin and to the need for a final liquidation of World War II.
However, no nation has really moved from the position it assumed years ago on how these admittedly necessary changes should be brought about. The Western position has been based, at least until recently, on the contention that there should be free all-German elections as the prerequisite to reunification and a peace settlement. The Russians have been vague on this matter but it is apparent that even if they use the same language as we do, they do not mean the same things. They clearly do not accept a unification of Germany by free all-German elections, if it means, as it would at this time, the obliteration of German communist political influence in East Germany. It may be that they are not really prepared to accept unification under any circumstances unless it means the domination of all of Germany by communism.

In the meantime, all have managed to live with the existing arrangements, with a divided Germany and Berlin, part free and part communist, with a Germany no longer at war but not yet fully at peace. On only two occasions have these arrangements been seriously challenged. They were hit by the Stalin-imposed blockade of Berlin in 1948. Then, in 1953, the communist political structure in East Germany was shaken by worker uprisings. Both attempts, as you know, failed. The Western nations committed enormous resources in the Berlin airlift and in the supply and reconstruction of West Berlin. Finally, Stalin was persuaded to abandon his attempt to force us from
the city and to unify it under communist control. The East German revolt which we supported with very articulate enthusiasm was suppressed by Soviet military power and the hope of a spontaneous unification of all Germany under freedom, in that fashion, was set back.

Since 1953, the status quo has not again been subjected to a major test anywhere in Germany. To be sure, there have been incidents which have sent tremors through the stability but they did not upset it. Just last November, for example, Mr. Khrushchev warned that he would change the status quo at Berlin. He did not schedule the execution of the change, however, until this month. Now, apparently, it has been postponed, pending the results of the coming conferences.

In short, the German situation is still held together by the same provisional, improvised arrangements which have held it together for years. These arrangements are tied to certain basic conditions, conditions which must prevail if the stability in Germany, in its present form, is to continue. We must see clearly what these conditions are if we are to measure the scope of the problem which confronts us. Let me, therefore, outline them at this point.

First, the present stability in Germany depends upon the absence of decisive accidents or provocations between the military forces of the West and the Soviet Union. It is conceivable that there may be hostile or threatening contact between
these forces, as indeed there has been, without a collapse. This contact, however, cannot go too far. At some undetermined point, military accidents or provocations are likely to set off a chain reaction which will engage in a decisive fashion the prestige—the face, so to speak—of the principal powers. At that point the irrevocable slide or plunge into the abyss of war will have begun.

That, then, is one condition of the continuance of the status quo in Germany, of the present stability which is neither peace nor war. There must be an absence of hostile accidents or provocations between the military forces in Germany which go beyond the point of no return.

The second condition is German acquiescence, the acquiescence of the people of the East as well as the West in the systems under which they now live. Let me say, parenthetically at this point that I do not suggest that this is desirable. I merely say that it is one of the factors which underlie the existing stability.

As a part of acquiescence, Germans must be willing to accept the continued division of their country, the continued presence of foreign troops in great numbers in their land and the military arrangements which join one segment of the nation to NATO for protection and subordinate the other to the Warsaw Pact.
The third basic condition of the status quo is that the Western powers and the Soviet Union must also tolerate the existing division of Germany and the present arrangements for occupation of a divided Berlin. In short, if the German people must accept the status quo, the Western Powers and the Soviet Union must not challenge it, at least they must not challenge it with anything much stronger than words. Further, the peoples of the West must be prepared, as must the people of the communist bloc to pay the ever-increasing costs of defense establishments and the instruments of cold war which are made necessary in part by the existing arrangements for keeping the status quo in Germany.

In stating these conditions, I emphasize again that I do not advocate them or subscribe to their desirability. I merely note them as underlying the present situation in Germany, as the conditions precedent to its continuance. These conditions are not the foundations of an equitable, rational and evolving peace in Germany and Central Europe. They are the patchwork timbering of an improvised truce. Nevertheless, they are the conditions on which the lives of the German people, the people of Europe and, in a larger sense, the survival of a recognizable human civilization now depend.

If one of these conditions is changed in any significant fashion, I cannot see that the present situation in Germany is likely to persist. It seems to me that it must either evolve into something more durable or it will collapse in the chaos of war, limited or unlimited.
Putting aside for a moment Mr. Khrushchev's announcement that he proposes to alter one of the conditions of the present stability, that is, the arrangement at Berlin, what of others? Can these others, in any event, be counted upon to support indefinitely the existing situation? I do not see how they can be. I believe that these other conditions have already changed markedly beneath the surface calm, that they are continuing to change and that they cannot change much more before the churning shall break through the surface.

In that sense, I am persuaded that the present stability in Germany was in the process of erosion long before Mr. Khrushchev's announcement last November. Indeed, I said so in the Senate many months prior to that time.

Let us look for a moment at the present state of these conditions of stability, these basic conditions which must prevail if there is to be no change in the German situation. Take the first—that there must be no military accident or provocation in Germany which goes beyond the point of no return. It is obvious that none, so far, has done so. But there have been grave near-misses. The Berlin Blockade was a massive near-miss. Since that time there have been other incidents, provocations. I need not catalogue them. You have seen reference to them time and again—to the buzzed transports, to the challenged convoys, to the downed planes and the detained soldiers. I do not know which of these incidents may have been prompted by higher Soviet headquarters and which may have come about by the whim of some
local commander. Given a conducive set of circumstances, however, it is far from inconceivable that any incident of this kind might go out of control.

Apart from deliberate provocation, there still remains the very real danger of military accident, if not on our part, then on theirs. The chances of accident multiply when forces are poised—as they are in Germany—at swords-point and are keyed tight by the electrified atmosphere of cold war, of propaganda war. They multiply again as the countdowns of the new weapons quicken and their delivery times shorten. They multiply still again as these devices of incredible devastation find their way into more and more hands. In this sense, then, a basic precondition of the status quo in Germany has indeed changed, quite apart from any recent change in Soviet policy with respect to Berlin. It has changed in the sense that the margin for military error or provocation has narrowed. The prospects are, moreover, that the margin will narrow still further as time goes on.

I believe, too, that it is reasonable to suggest that the acquiescence of the Germans—East and West—the second basic condition on which the status quo rests, has also changed significantly and will continue to change. It is, of course, difficult to document the sentiment of a whole people. We are informed, however, that there is great unexpressed discontent in East Germany. We know, moreover, that there are movements for reunification and neutralization in Western Germany, even if we
cannot measure their strength. We must assume that currents of a similar and probably stronger kind flow through East Germany even though Mr. Gallup has yet to conduct a poll in that region.

It is obvious that the defeated Germany, the disarmed Germany, the shattered, starving Germany for which the present improvised arrangements of stability were devised, no longer exists. As I noted earlier in my remarks, at least in one zone—in the West—there is a revitalized nation. Furthermore, in both zones, there now exist German military forces and political structures manned by Germans, even if, in the East, they may not be controlled ultimately by Germans. In both zones, finally, a new generation is coming into its own—a generation which was young in the days of defeat but which, now and in the years immediately ahead, will inevitably rise to leadership in Germany. In these circumstances, it would be unrealistic in the extreme to believe that the arrangements for stability which exist in Germany—designed in another hour and for another setting and modified only within each zone separately—will continue to serve for the indefinite future. In short, we must face the likelihood that the second condition of the status quo—the continued acquiescence of the German people in division and quasi-occupation may well be drawing to an end. We must reckon with the strong possibility that, increasingly, Germans will seek their unity and national equality by whatever means may be available if constructive machinery to facilitate it in peace and order does not exist.
As for the third basic condition on which the present stability in Germany rests, I have already noted that if we are to go on as we are, the Western nations and the Soviet Union must not challenge the existing arrangements with anything much stronger than words. In fact, except for dangerous but limited military incidents and provocations, neither has challenged it, in any other fashion in recent years. Further I said that both the people of the Western nations and the Soviet Union must be willing to pay the ever-increasing costs of defense establishments and the instruments of cold war to keep a rough equilibrium of force not only in Germany but throughout the world. That, too, has been done until now, although I would be less than honest if I did not express my deep concern over continuing reports that the Soviet effort in this respect is greater than our own. I am not in a position to evaluate those reports. The official secrecy--necessary and unnecessary--which engulfs this question cannot be easily penetrated by Members of Congress. The disquieting reports, however, come from highly qualified and competent sources and they do not auger well for the future. They certainly raise doubts about the likelihood of maintaining the present stability in Germany or anywhere else for that matter.

Finally, the third condition of the status quo also depends upon the maintenance of the present arrangements at Berlin. We now know that these arrangements have been challenged. Mr. Khrushchev has assailed the Western position in Berlin and
demanded that it change. He has done so, however, only in words and, in that respect, his challenge is not new.

What is new, what does threaten the status quo is the strange action by which Mr. Khrushchev proposes to bring about this change. He proposes to withdraw himself from Berlin, that is, he says that he will remove Soviet forces from the city and from the routes of access to it. Our official answer has been equally strange. We have said, in effect, that the Russians cannot leave the city and the routes of access, that they certainly cannot leave it in spirit and perhaps not even in body. After trying for many years to get the Russians out of the areas into which they sprawled after World War II, here is one place that we do not wish them to leave.

The reason for this is clear. If the Russians do quit Berlin, they will turn over the instruments of control to East German communists. That opens, for the Soviet Union, a large field of manoeuvre in the war of nerves. But in a more fundamental sense, the action will also work a change in the underlying conditions of the status quo in Germany. It will increase the strains and stresses on the essential military restraints which are a part of the present stability. It will do the same to German acquiescence which is also a part of it. In short, the entire German situation will move into a period of grave instability out of which is likely to emerge either a new status quo or conflict.
There has been a great deal of speculation on why Mr. Khrushchev has threatened to take this step. One may assume, of course, that Mr. Khrushchev has been motivated by what he believes will be ultimately to the advantage of the Soviet Union and world communism. I would hope that we are equally motivated by what we believe to be to the advantage of the United States and to world freedom.

What is significant at this moment, is not so much the ultimate aims of Soviet communism. We know what they are and it is of little value to intone them again and again as though this litany will somehow protect us from them. More significant is the question of how Mr. Khrushchev proposes to serve communist interests through Soviet policies at a moment in history when the transcendent interests of civilization, and of the human species itself, rest in delicate balance between survival and nuclear obliteration.

No one who is not privy to the operations of Mr. Khrushchev's mind and the inner working of the machinery of Soviet communism can be certain of what lies beneath the Soviet manoeuvre at Berlin. The move could have been motivated by a combination of any of a score of reasons, some logical, some illogical, some groping towards peace, some stumbling towards war.

The interpretation of the charades of Soviet policy may be a fascinating game. As I have already noted, however, this game is essentially speculative. What seems to me most
important at this point is not to guess at the obscure contents of the Soviet mind but rather to get clearly in our own minds what it is that we--the Western nations--seek in this situation. What is most important is to make certain that what we seek is reasonably related to the situation that exists in Germany today, not to one which we would like to exist or one which may have existed years ago and no longer exists.

If the interests of this nation, of freedom and of human civilization lay only in maintaining existing arrangements in Germany, if Mr. Khrushchev's manoeuvre at Berlin were the only threat to these arrangements then, indeed, it would be sufficient to counter that manoeuvre merely by "standing firm."

Is that, however, the case? I think it is clear that Mr. Khrushchev's manoeuvre at Berlin is not the only danger to the status quo in Germany. Further, I question whether an effort to maintain that status quo indefinitely is, in fact, in accord with the interests of this nation, freedom and human civilization.

To be sure, we shall "stand firm" at Berlin and in Germany. I know of no responsible person in the government of this nation who holds otherwise. I certainly do not hold otherwise. Moreover, I know of no statesman in the Western world who holds otherwise. We shall stand firm because to permit the forces of freedom to be frightened, cajoled or driven from Berlin--the future capital of all Germany--will be to remove
one of the props of the present stability in that country before another firmer support is in place. Let us not, however, confuse the necessity for standing firm in that sense with a mere maintenance of present arrangements in Germany for the indefinite future.

I am not persuaded that the interests of this nation, of freedom and of human civilization lie in an indefinite continuance of the present military situation in Berlin and in Germany, a situation which, increasingly, will permit an accident or an irresponsible local provocation to precipitate the suicide of civilization. I am not persuaded that these interests are served by perpetuating arrangements in Germany which offer little prospect of progress towards peaceful unification to the German people. I am not persuaded that these interests are served by the ever-mounting costs of the arms rivalry of the cold war, and the propaganda war--costs which are occasioned in great part by the existing situation in Germany.

What I am trying to suggest, in short, is that it is not enough, in our own interests, merely to stand fast in Germany, as an end in itself. It is not enough merely to seek to sustain an existing situation which is ceasing to be adequate for minimum stability in Germany and Central Europe. Rather, we must stand fast in order to go forward, in order to establish more equitable, rational and evolving conditions of peace.

That is the challenge of the impending conferences on Germany. We must strive in them, it seems to me, to create a
less volatile situation in Berlin, not merely by changing the Western position in that city as the Russians have suggested but perhaps by altering the status of the entire city, by internationalizing all Berlin under United Nations or other satisfactory international auspices as an interim arrangement. We must seek a readjustment of the military situation in all of Germany and Central Europe in a fashion which promises to reduce the danger of war by accident or provocation. We must seek, finally, a beginning on the spread of political freedom throughout Germany and on German unification and, to that end, we must enlist in far greater measure than heretofore, the participation of the Germans themselves--East and West.

I realize, fully, that we shall not get anywhere with negotiations to these ends if the Russians are not of a mind, in their own interest, to move in a similar direction. As I have said, I do not presume to know the contents of the Soviet mind at this time, nor do I know of anyone who does. I do know that regardless of Russian intentions we shall not begin to move towards these ends unless we ourselves are clear as to where it is we want to go. We require at this point in time, beyond all else, a frank recognition of the importance of a change in Germany, a change not in the manner expounded by the Russians and not necessarily in the manner first projected by ourselves years ago. Rather, we need a change which conforms to the realities of the present, a change brought about by concessions which match concessions. To this task, we--all the Western nations--must bring a new dedication, a new determination to develop equitable, durable and evolving conditions of peace.