

The Diplomatic Note Crisis between the Soviet Union and Finland in 1961:

A Reflection of the Cold War or a Soviet Attempt to Meddle in a Sovereign Nation's Affairs?

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1. Abstrakti suomeksi

Tutkimuksen aihe on vuoden 1961 noottikriisi ja sen eri tulkinnat ja tulkintojen erot. Neuvostoliitto lähetti Suomelle nootin, jossa YYA-sopimukseen nojaten vaati sotilaallisten konsultaatioiden aloittamista Länsi-Saksan muodostaman sotilaallisen uhan johdosta. Tasavallan presidentti Kekkonen oli nootin lähettämisen aikaan, marraskuun lopulla 1961, valtiovierailulla Yhdysvalloissa ja palattuaan alkoi selvittää asiaa. Noottikriisi ratkesi Kekkonen matkustettua Novosibirskiin Siperiaan tapaamaan Neuvostoliiton johtajaa, Nikita Hrustshevia. Nootin todelliset tarkoitusperät ovat jääneet epäselviksi. Suomen presidentin vaalit oli määrä toimittaa helmikuussa. Tämä on aikaansaanut paljon keskustelua ja arveluita. Max Jakobsonin, Hannu Rautkallion, Viktor Vladimirovin sekä Juhani Suomen Kekkos-päiväkirjojen noottikriisitulkintoja on verrattu ja niiden eroavaisuuksia ja yhtäläisyyksiä on tutkittu.

Hannu Rautkallio, joka aikanaan herätti paljon kohua tutkimuksillaan, väittää, että Kekkonen ja muutamat neuvostoagentit olisivat sopineet nootista etukäteen, jotta Kekkonen varmasti voittaisi vuoden 1962 presidentinvaalit. Juhani Suomi puolestaan sanoo, ettei noottikriisillä ollut salaista syytä, ja että Kekkonen ei tiennyt siitä etukäteen. Viktor Vladimirov toteaa kirjassaan, että nootin tarkoitus oli varmistaa Kekkonen uudelleenvalinta, mutta Kekkonen ei tilannut noottia eikä mitään salaliittoa ollut. Max Jakobsonin tulkinta puolestaan on eräänlainen yhdistelmä edellä mainituista. Hän liittää nootin presidentinvaaleihin, mutta myös kylmään sotaan, joka oli hyvin lähellä muuttua kuumaksi sodaksi juuri nootin lähettämisen aikoihin, sekä Neuvostoliiton sisäpoliittiseen tilanteeseen. Varman johtopäätöksen tekeminen on vaikeaa, mutta yllämainittujen tulkintojen tarkempi arviointi tekee Jakobsonin tulkinnasta uskottavimman, lähinnä koska nootin lähettämisellä oli todennäköisesti monta tarkoitusperää. Kekkonen oli erittäin halukas pysymään vallassa, ja halusi lämpimät suhteet sekä itään että länteen. Neuvostojohto halusi, että Kekkonen valitaan uudelleen, mutta heidän omilla ehdoillaan. Nootin tarkoitus oli varmistaa hänen vaalivoittonsa, mutta samalla ”palauttaa hänet ruotuun”. Kylmä sota ja Neuvostoliiton sisäinen valtataisto olivat myös osasyitä nootin lähettämiseen.

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2. Introduction

In 1961 the cold war almost became a hot one; The situation in Berlin made US-Soviet relations very tense, and this tension climaxed the following year during the Cuban missile crisis. Finland, bordering the Soviet Union in the west, was in political turmoil as well. President Urho Kekkonen, was strongly opposed by a large coalition of parties who supported Olavi Honka for presidency. Elections were to be held the following year. In October 1961, Kekkonen left for a state visit to Canada and the United States. His mission was to prove to the western powers that Finland was truly a neutral country and politically independent. Towards the end of the trip, however, the Soviet Union sent a note, a very strong diplomatic weapon, to Finland, which warned about the increasing militarism of West-Germany and its allies and called for military consultations with Finland in accordance with the FCMA treaty¹.

There has been a lot of speculation as to why the Soviets sent the note. There are several different interpretations to why the note was sent. I intend to go through the main interpretations, mainly those of Hannu Rautkallio, Viktor Vladimirov, Max Jakobson and Juhani Suomi, the official Kekkonen historian. Rautkallio, for example, claims that the note was the result of a Kekkonen-Soviet conspiracy. Other interpretations link the note to the cold war in general, Soviet inner politics and a desire to bring Finland more strongly to the Soviet sphere of influence in Europe. After having looked at the different interpretations, I will examine their credibility in addition to comparing and contrasting them. Drawing a conclusion, or finding the “truth” of the matter might be a difficult task because existing evidence is far from consistent. More likely the question is whose interpretation is closest to the truth.²

¹ FCMA treaty (Ystävyys, yhteistyö ja avunantosopimus) - Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance treaty which Finland had signed with the Soviets in 1948.

² For further background and detail related to the note crisis, refer to the appendix - *the Historical Events Related to the Note Crisis* on page 16.

3.1 The Conspiracy Theory: Hannu Rautkallio

Once the Soviet Union had collapsed, the secrecy of its archives was eased. Professor Hannu Rautkallio, of Tampere University, went to see Soviet, British and US archives and researched material which concerned Kekkonen and Finnish foreign policy³. Rautkallio was given documents on which he bases several books.^{4 5} The conclusion he draws is that Kekkonen and the Soviets worked closely together to ensure Kekkonen's victory in the elections of 1962. The note was a part of the plan.

Rautkallio starts by explaining that the "Honka"-alliance was seen as a true threat by the Soviets. Ensuring Kekkonen's victory in the elections was the primary reason for sending the note. Planning Kekkonen's victory in the elections had begun already in 1960 when Khrushchev came to celebrate Kekkonen's birthday and according to a 1961 Soviet embassy classified annual report, the note had nothing to do with the military threat posed by West-Germany but related to Finnish politics.⁶

Rautkallio claims that Kekkonen met with the Soviet ambassador a day before his visit to Norway in March 1961 to receive instructions on what to say and also consulted with him before his state visits to the UK and the USA.⁷ Rautkallio says that the note's final planning was done during Brezhnev's visit to Finland in late September 1961. The purpose of the visit was solely to boost Kekkonen's image in Finland and give the impression that the Soviets would not accept anyone else, this could be seen in Brezhnev's public speeches.⁸

According to Rautkallio's findings, Soviet foreign minister Gromyko, had no idea about Kekkonen and Khrushchev's secret plan while handing the note. Rautkallio backs this by arguing that a

³ Rautkallio accessed documents mainly from the archives of the CPSU central committee, the US state department and the British Foreign Office.

⁴ "*Novosibirskin Lavastus*" or "*Staging of Novosibirsk*" tells about how Kekkonen had very close relations with the Soviet leaders and Soviet diplomats working in Finland. Rautkallio claims that his meetings with them and the several state visits to Russia as well as the Russians' visits to Finland were not only diplomatic conversation. He has also written several other books on Kekkonen's relations with the Soviets. *Agenda Suomi* is Rautkallio's newest book and summarises his findings over the years.

⁵ On his section on the note crisis, he relies mainly on some documents written by KGB-officer J. V. Voronin and the annual report of the Soviet embassy in Helsinki from 1961.

⁶ The report claimed that the note related to a "plan proposed by Kekkonen to the Soviets" including "the weakening of the Honka-alliance, the dissolving of parliament and the holding of parliamentary elections at the same time as the presidential elections". The report continues: "For that reason, the agrarian party (Kekkonen) needed a convincing excuse for dissolving parliament which would cover up the manoeuvre. The excuse used was our note sent on the 30th of October". Hannu Rautkallio, *Agenda Suomi* (WSOY 1999) p.132

⁷ Ibid. p.135

⁸ Ibid. p.155

situation where the military has an opinion of its own would be impossible in a country with such an autocratic leader. The official explanation given by Gromyko to Karjalainen was that the Soviet military had demanded consultations for a long time but until November, the leadership had resisted.⁹ According to Rautkallio, however, the true purpose of the note was obvious because it was sent at the “wrong time” for its literary meaning to be true. The Berlin crisis had already been partly resolved at the time of the note (the Berlin wall was put up in August 1961) but since the note had been planned already in August or September, this was not taken into account.¹⁰

Kekkonen’s reaction after hearing about the note also “proves” that he knew about it beforehand. He did not get at all nervous and continued as if nothing serious had happened, even though it was the worst political crisis in Finland since the 1958 “yöpakkaset” – nightfrost.¹¹ He played down the seriousness of the crisis and turned down US assistance claiming it would make the situation even worse. Rautkallio claims that, American intervention would have ruined Kekkonen’s plan because it would have put the Soviets in a difficult position and made the simple staging of the meeting in Novosibirsk more complicated. Rautkallio concludes that the note worked perfectly as planned. There were no further complications after Kekkonen had dissolved parliament. The note forced Olavi Honka to renounce his candidacy thus ending the Honka alliance. Furthermore, Kekkonen and Khrushchev’s “negotiations” made Kekkonen look like a master of tough diplomacy resulting in his overwhelming victory in the elections of 1962.¹²

⁹ Ibid. p.147

¹⁰ Ibid. p.153

¹¹ In 1958, the Soviet Union all of a sudden froze its relations with Finland causing a scare. Kekkonen resolved the crisis by changing the government.

¹² Hannu Rautkallio, *Agenda Suomi* (WSOY 1999) p.174

3.2 The Soviet version: Viktor Vladimirov

Viktor Vladimirov¹³ starts his account by giving a description of the historical events involving the note crisis and like many other historians brings up the Finnish inner political situation. Kekkonen had a serious opponent, Olavi Honka, and the upcoming election would be a close call. Vladimirov admits openly that the Soviet leadership was in full support of Kekkonen as the Finnish president and that already in 1960 they started preparing measures to support his re-election in 1962.

Vladimirov says that Rautkallio's allegations of Kekkonen being a traitor and a Soviet "agent" are conclusions based on very thin evidence. Kekkonen's actions were more normal political tactics than crooked actions and in fact, Kekkonen was the one calling the shots in his meetings with Khrushchev. "Kekkonen enchanted Khrushchev" and was able to trick the Soviets into thinking he was fully on their side while taking advantage of the situation by gaining concessions for Finland.¹⁴ Furthermore, he didn't take orders from the CPSU¹⁵ central committee, but met only with Soviet leaders, most of them just happened to be in high positions in the party as well.

Kekkonen's opponent in the elections, Honka, was not liked by the Soviets. He was relatively unknown but supported by Väinö Tanner¹⁶, the Soviet's worst political enemy in Finland. This alone made him unsuitable. He might steer Finland to a course towards the west instead of maintaining friendly relations with the east like Kekkonen. The Soviet embassy in Helsinki thought they should help Kekkonen win the elections. His plan of dissolving the parliament and organising new elections right after the presidential ones was told to the Soviet embassy in confidence, but the embassy wasn't sure whether he had a good enough excuse for his political manoeuvre. The embassy staff started to think about different ways to weaken the Honka alliance; sending a diplomatic note was seen as a solution: It would also give Kekkonen a good excuse to dissolve parliament. Vladimirov says that the heaviness of the diplomatic weaponry used due to Khrushchev's Russian character; he did not want to act softly when Soviet national security was concerned.¹⁷

¹³ Viktor Vladimirov was the ranking KGB officer working in the Soviet embassy in Helsinki on several occasions during 1954-1984. He acted as a direct link between Finnish and Soviet leaders bypassing Foreign office protocol. In his memoirs, a book called "Näin se oli", or "So it happened", he has written a thorough account of the note crisis from the KGB or Soviet diplomat viewpoint. The book has been written right after the fall of the Soviet Union.

¹⁴ Viktor Vladimirov, *Näin se oli* (Otava 1993) p.125

¹⁵ CPSU – Communist Party of the Soviet Union

¹⁶ Tanner was the head of the Finnish Social Democratic Party

¹⁷ Viktor Vladimirov, *Näin se oli* (Otava 1993) p.132

Vladimirov denies the initiative for sending the note coming from Kekkonen. He claims to have known the “architect of the note” V. V. Zenihov well. The note was a Soviet idea. Vladimirov believes, however, that Kekkonen was warned about it beforehand. It would have been a bad idea to surprise him with something like this especially when it was sent with his best interests in mind. This would explain his calm behaviour once hearing about the note but would also mean that Kekkonen was not completely honest when informing Finns about his actions in Novosibirsk. The Novosibirsk meeting would have been “staged” and Kekkonen’s diplomatic victory questionable. Vladimirov, however, does not have sure knowledge whether Kekkonen knew about the note or not since he himself was not involved in the sending of the note.

3.3 The Official Finnish Version: Kekkonen's diaries edited by Juhani Suomi

Kekkonen wrote extensive diaries and after his death, Juhani Suomi edited them and wrote the official Kekkonen biography. The diaries describe Kekkonen's side of the matter.

Suomi claims that in 1961, Khrushchev was being pressured by the Soviet military and the Molotovist faction in the CPSU to take strong action against neighbouring countries.¹⁸ The note and the explosion of huge nuclear bomb on the 30th of October were Khrushchev's response to these military factions. To back this claim, Suomi brings up the fact that already in January 1961 ambassador Wuori had warned Kekkonen about the inner political situation evolving in the Soviet Union. He thought it very possible that some kind of diplomatic action might be taken to force Finland into military consultations.¹⁹

Finland, however, wasn't the note's target itself, just a convenient medium to get the message through; only 3% of the note discussed Finland. The intention was to warn Denmark, Norway and Sweden of the increasing militarism of West-Germany. These countries had received already so many diplomatic notes, however, that a new one wouldn't have received the necessary attention. The Soviets thought Kekkonen was becoming too friendly with the west and this was the another reason for sending the note to Finland; Kekkonen was still in America at the time. After the note arrived, Kekkonen tried to diminish the effect it had on the work he had done to present Finland as a neutral country in the west. He was bitter at the Soviets for destroying his work.²⁰ According to the diaries, this is the reason why Kekkonen did not return immediately to Finland after hearing about the note. The reason was not that he would have known about it beforehand.

Khrushchev was dissatisfied with the Finnish communist party and had to rely on Kekkonen as his "ally" although he represented a right wing party. Before his trip to Novosibirsk, Kekkonen learned that a delegation of Finnish communists had travelled to Moscow in late October, a week before the note was sent. Khrushchev had hinted that a note would be sent and gave the Finnish communists a

¹⁸ Juhani Suomi, *Kriisien aika, Urho Kekkonen 1956-1962, (Kekkonen's diaries 1956-62)* (Otava 1992) p.543

¹⁹ "All things taken into consideration I would like to emphasise that we should at least mentally be prepared for a crisis this year. We always have to keep in mind our friendship, co-operation and mutual assistance treaty of 1948. On the other hand we should maintain unity at home and good relations with the east. I don't want to provoke anxiety but we should still be better aware of the situation. The year 1961 will probably turn out to be significant." (Finnish ambassador to the Soviet Union, Wuori, in his letter to Kekkonen in January 1961) Ibid, p.479-480

²⁰ Ibid, p.486-487

chance to affect its content. It was the delegation that had demanded that clauses concerning the Finnish inner political situation be added to the note. After the note had been sent, several Finnish communists spoke about how it helped fight the battle against the Honka-alliance.²¹

According to the diaries, Kekkonen specifically forbade Karjalainen from taking up the possibility of dissolving parliament as he sent him to Moscow for preliminary negotiations.²² Karjalainen didn't obey, however, and after Gromyko had told him that the question was specifically about the continuation of Finnish foreign policy, Kekkonen decided to dissolve parliament.²³ This failed to resolve the crisis, but the Soviets had now indicated that the note was about Finnish inner politics. Kekkonen was then able to take advantage of the situation by emphasising the Soviet trust placed in him.

Khrushchev had praised Kekkonen as a friend already when visiting him at his 60th birthday in September 1960. It was in Soviet interests in Finland to see the continuation of Kekkonen's East-friendly foreign policy. A question commonly raised is why Khrushchev maintained a very tough line on Finland right after the note had been sent but then backed down on the consultation demands when Kekkonen visited him in Novosibirsk. As a reason, the diaries suggest that Khrushchev had beaten the militarist faction in the Party conference during which the note was sent.²⁴ Although "unnecessary", the negotiations in Novosibirsk were carried out in order to maximise the threatening effect on Finland. Although not originally included, the parts which talked about Finnish inner politics could also be taken advantage of. The negotiations could help ensure the continuation of Kekkonen's foreign policy. The trip was of course a great personal victory for him which undoubtedly helped him win the presidential elections of 1962. His main opponent Honka's renouncement of candidacy during to Novosibirsk finalised his victory.²⁵

²¹ Ibid, p.508

²² Kekkonen wanted to save the possibility as a means to tackle the Honka alliance, however, this contradicts several sources such as Vladimirov and Jakobson which claim that Kekkonen had informed the Soviets about his plan against the Honka alliance already in April 1961.

²³ Ibid, p.500

²⁴ Juhani Suomi, *Kriisien aika, Urho Kekkonen 1956-1962, (Kekkonen's diaries 1956-62)* (Otava 1992) p.547

²⁵ Ibid, p.548

3.4 The diplomatic historian's view: Max Jakobson

One of the greatest authorities when examining Finnish foreign policy in the 60's can be considered to be Max Jakobson, who had a lifelong diplomatic career both in the Finnish foreign ministry and the UN. Unfortunately, he was unable to give an interview but called the author and summarised his basic thoughts on the note. He has also written several books which discuss the note.

In Jakobson's own words, the note sent by the Soviet Union was a "diplomatic multiple warhead missile"²⁶. Jakobson writes in his book that he was sure from the very beginning that the note was a Soviet attempt to affect the outcome of the Finnish presidential elections.²⁷ The fact that the Finnish communist party discussed the note as an aide to tackle Honka supports Jakobson's view. The Finnish communists were responsible for adding the part to the note which dealt with Finland. When interviewed on the phone Jakobson emphasised that he cannot accept Kekkonen having "ordered" it.²⁸ Jakobson also links the note with the ongoing Soviet communist party general assembly. He once asked a high ranking Soviet diplomat Vasili Kuznetsov why the note was sent while President Kekkonen was away from Finland. He replied: "You must consider the fact that the CPSU general assembly was just about to end. The note had to be published before the meeting ended". When Jakobson asked why, Kuznetsov replied "This is a very sensitive matter" and didn't explain further.²⁹

In Jakobson's view, the note was meant to warn Norway, Denmark and perhaps Sweden as well about becoming too closely allied with West-Germany and other western powers. In this sense, the note was a cold war issue. One mustn't forget that late 1961 was a time of great tension on the world political scene and the question of Berlin was still very flammable.

Jakobson also regards the note as an attempt to destroy Finnish neutrality, at least in the eyes of western leaders, whom Kekkonen had tried to persuade during his state visit to the USA. The Soviets destroyed Kekkonen's work but at the same time wanted him to become re-elected. An important implication of the presidential elections being the issue was Gromyko's reply to his

²⁶ Diplomatic Multiple Warhead Missile is the term used about the note in Jakobson's book "Vuosisadan tilinpäätös"

²⁷ Max Jakobson, *20. vuosisadan tilinpäätös* (Otava 2001) p. 317

²⁸ Phone conversation between Max Jakobson and Antti Koulumies on Wed. 18th August

²⁹ Ibid, p.318

Finnish counterpart Karjalainen when asked about the note.³⁰ This meeting on 11 November 1961 was when Karjalainen brought up the president's planned dissolving of parliament. Kekkonen had planned this since April and had also told the Soviet ambassador of his plan to weaken the Honka alliance. This has given rise to the theory of the note being intended to cover up this political manoeuvre. Jakobson, however, does not believe this because in April it was impossible to know what the situation in Berlin would be in November. However, it is good evidence of the political game Kekkonen played with the Soviets. He was in very friendly terms with them and used them to maintain power and serve his own intentions.³¹ In addition, the Soviet Union funded Kekkonen's presidential campaign.³² Juhani Suomi claims that Kekkonen didn't know what he was in for on his way to Novosibirsk. Jakobson, however, believes that Kekkonen knew that the Soviets wanted him to continue as president and therefore he expected to return from his trip as a "winner". Kekkonen did not use a Finnish interpreter while talking with Khrushchev "one to one" in Novosibirsk nor do there exist any notes written by the Soviets. These discussions would be the key to knowing the truth about the note. Jakobson says that the absolute truth of the matter will probably never be found out.³³ He concludes his assessment of the note crisis, however, by saying that Kekkonen was a wise politician for whom power was essential. He doesn't believe that Kekkonen ordered the note because it undermined his work in America. Jakobson believes that the British ambassador to Finland, Con O'Neill went straight to the point when he wrote: "The note helped Kekkonen win the elections but also reminded Finns about their dependency on the Soviet Union and undermined Finnish neutrality."³⁴

³⁰ Gromyko said: "The current political situation in Finland is very unstable. A certain group is trying to prevent the continuation of the Paasikivi-Kekkonen foreign policy. Taking into consideration interests of security of the Soviet Union, we want to be assured that the current foreign policy shall continue. This is the reason why we proposed the consultations. (Ibid, p. 323)

³¹ Ibid, p.324

³² Jakobson, *20. vuosisadan tilinpäätös*, p, 325 and also Rautkallio, Tshernous, *NKP ja Suomi, keskuskomitean salaisia salaisia dokumentteja 1955-1968*, (CPSU secret documents compiled by Hannu Rautkallio and V.N Tshernous) (Tammi 1992) p. 122-123

³³ Phone conversation between Max Jakobson and Antti Koulumies on Wed. 18 August

³⁴ Max Jakobson, *20. vuosisadan tilinpäätös*, (Otava 2001) p. 334

4. Evaluation of sources and analysis of the interpretations

The four major interpretations presented disagree in several cases. They have, however, similarities as well.

Hannu Rautkallio presents Kekkonen as a conspirator. His views are quite radical and all the other writers attack his claims. The material Rautkallio used was mainly from KGB and CPSU archives and they are thoroughly referenced. He mainly bases his research on the annual report of the Soviet embassy in Helsinki, the diary of the Soviet ambassador Zaharov and some KGB documents written by major Voronin. Whether the Soviet sources tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth can be doubted. They have probably been written in a way that serves the interests of the writer. The Soviet documents are a valuable source when thinking about Soviet attitudes towards Kekkonen and other Finnish politicians, but are not necessarily reliable for studying the truth related to Finno-Soviet relations. As mentioned earlier, there are few Finnish documents that cover negotiations held between Finnish and Soviet statesmen because Kekkonen often used only Soviet interpreters. The Soviet Union was an extensive bureaucracy filled with corruption, therefore was probably somewhat easy for Rautkallio to find the documents he was looking for. Rautkallio does not speak Russian, so he has had to use a Soviet interpreter. His interpreter, V.N Tshernous was at least at the time the deputy director of the central committee archives. He was part of the Soviet system before its collapse. This gives rise to speculation whether there were any of Tshernous' ideological or patriotic interests involved.

Viktor Vladimirov directly contradicts several of Rautkallio's statements: For example, Rautkallio's claim that Kekkonen would have "received instructions from the central committee of the Soviet Communist Party" before his trips to the UK and the USA, Vladimirov denies by explaining that it was in the best interests of the Soviet ambassador to Finland, Alexei Zaharov, that he give an impression to Moscow that the local politicians listen to him. In fact, according to Vladimirov, these "instructions" were just normal diplomacy. Vladimirov has, however, limitations as a source. He was the ranking KGB officer in Finland but he was not present at the time of the note crisis. His claim that Kekkonen knew about the note beforehand is not absolute because it is based on his strong belief rather than knowledge. He does not provide hard evidence to support his claims and furthermore, the credibility of his views, although published after the fall of the Soviet

Union, can be questioned because he might want to give an impression of having been more in the know than he really was.

Kekkonen's diaries edited by Juhani Suomi also contradict Rautkallio in many ways. In the diaries Suomi claims that the note was a complete surprise to Kekkonen who was even willing to renounce his candidacy because he felt the work he had done in the United States and Canada had all gone to waste. After deciding that he must go on, he handled the situation in Novosibirsk in a way which was regarded by many as masterful diplomacy. Kekkonen's diaries cannot be taken as the truth as such, however, because they have been edited by Kekkonen's ally rather than an objective historian. Juhani Suomi was one of Kekkonen's last trustees in the Finnish foreign ministry. Suomi denies that in April 1961 Kekkonen would have told ambassador Zaharov of his plan to dissolve parliament as a weapon against Honka. Jakobson, Vladimirov and Rautkallio all say otherwise with evidence to prove it.

Max Jakobson, whose book is the most recent, combines the interpretations of Suomi and Vladimirov adding some of his own information gathered from diplomatic contacts. He calls the note a multiple warhead missile meaning that it had several purposes. He agrees mostly with Suomi and Vladimirov and disagrees with Rautkallio on most matters. Jakobson was able to follow Finnish politics close by but not having been politically tied to Kekkonen, in addition to the fact that that he looks at the situation from several angles makes him a very valuable source.

In addition to the sources analysed more extensively, there are several others which add to the multitude of different interpretations. Tuure Junnila, a politician from the time and opponent of Kekkonen, writes in his book that he does not believe that Kekkonen blatantly conspired with the Soviets to ensure his victory.³⁵ Kekkonen was power hungry, but patriotic and wanted to win without outside help. Tuure Junnila wrote his book before Rautkallio, but it is clear that he would not agree with the conspiracy theory. A very recently published political biography of Kekkonen by Jukka Seppinen also denies Rautkallio's statements. It is mostly a compilation of secondary sources, but the author believes Juhani Suomi and Max Jakobson, not Rautkallio.³⁶

In order to draw a conclusion, we must find matters on which most sources agree on. Most importantly, all sources say that the literary meaning of the note was not all there was to it.

³⁵ Tuure Junnila, *Kekkosen valtakaudesta Koiviston aikaan*, (From Kekkonen's time to Koivisto's) (Alea-kirja 1985)

³⁶ Jukka Seppinen, *Urho Kekkonen Suomen johtaja*, Urho Kekkonen, Finland's leader (Ajatus kirjat 2004)

Jakobson and Suomi link the note with the cold war situation concerning West-Germany; the note was a warning to the Scandinavian countries. Jakobson and Suomi link the note also with Soviet inner politics; Khrushchev was being pressured by the militarist “Molotov faction” to take a harder stance against the USSR’s neighbours.

A matter on which Jakobson, Rautkallio and Vladimirov agree on is that Kekkonen and Khrushchev discussed strategies how to ensure Kekkonen’s victory in the 1962 elections already in September 1960 when Khrushchev visited Kekkonen on his birthday. Furthermore, it is a fact that the CPSU funded Kekkonen’s campaign. According to Rautkallio, Jakobson and Vladimirov, Kekkonen informed the Soviet embassy about his plan to dissolve parliament as a measure to tackle the Honka-alliance already in April 1961. This supports the theory that the note was aimed to help Kekkonen in the elections. The note, however, was not entirely a positive thing for Kekkonen because it undermined his work in the UK, USA and Canada. He himself called his frequent contacts with the Soviet embassy “preventive diplomacy” but at least according to Jakobson, it was a way to strengthen his power. Vladimirov and Rautkallio claim that Kekkonen would have known about the note beforehand, but they have no certainty on the matter; Vladimirov wasn’t working in Finland at the time.

As Jakobson himself explained to the author the absolute truth of the matter will never be known fully due to the limitations related to the material at hand.

5. Conclusion

Although one can never be certain of the truth behind the Note Crisis, thorough research of the different interpretations enables one to draw some kind of a conclusion. Why was the note sent?

Based on the information given by most sources, it is not probable that Kekkonen and the Soviets agreed on the sending of the note, as Rautkallio suggests. Jakobson sees the note as a result of several factors. Most importantly it reflected the tense situation in the bi-polar world scene. Secondly, it was an attempt of the Soviets to meddle in Finnish politics and possibly also a question of Khrushchev's survival as leader of the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that Kekkonen was eager to stay in power. The Soviets probably didn't like the fact that they had to support a right wing politician in order to ensure friendly relations with Finland. Supporting Kekkonen was, however, acceptable to them whereas Kekkonen wanted to maintain a policy of neutrality which was probably a good idea with the cold war going on. The Soviets undoubtedly helped Kekkonen in the elections by giving financial aid and probably one aim of the note was to ensure his victory. Kekkonen, however, didn't order the note. Why would he have done so when it harmed his position in the eyes of the western leaders so much? Kekkonen wanted the Soviets to help him but under his terms. The Soviets wanted Kekkonen to be re-elected but wanted it to happen under their terms. The note was an attempt on their part to force Kekkonen back to line. He was annoyed by the note but masterfully took advantage of the situation.

It must be emphasised, however, that the whole truth related to the note will probably never be known certainly. One reason is that diplomacy is not simple. Who knew what and how precisely are questions which cannot always be answered in a straightforward manner because patriotism and personal interests might be involved. Choosing the correct sources to rely on is a problem for historical research in general.

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Appendix:

The Historical Events involving the Note Crisis

President Urho Kekkonen had amicable relations with the leaders of the Soviet Union, especially the autocratic premier Nikita Khrushchev. Earlier in 1961, Kekkonen and Khrushchev had come to an agreement over Finland's EFTA membership³⁷, which was regarded by many as great victory for Kekkonen. In April, Kekkonen went on a state visit to the United Kingdom and in October visited Canada and the United States. His talks with the leaders of these countries were mostly about Finnish neutrality; Kekkonen wanted to act as bridge between the east and the west and show both parties that Finland was an independent and neutral country.³⁸

After the official part of the trip, Kekkonen and his party went to Hawaii for a couple of days of relaxation. While they were there, however, on 30 October 1961, the Soviet foreign minister Gromyko handed a note to the Finnish ambassador in Moscow. In the note, the Soviets expressed their concern over the increasing threat caused by West Germany and called for military consultations in accordance with the FCMA treaty. This was a serious matter for Finland who wanted to retain its neutrality. The president of the United States, John F. Kennedy had acknowledged Finland's neutrality while meeting Kekkonen only a few days earlier. On the same day, the Soviet Union carried out a massive nuclear experiment by blowing up a 60 kiloton atom bomb.

Kekkonen was told about the note the next day and decided to finish his visit to America as planned. He sent his foreign secretary Ahti Karjalainen back to Helsinki. On the second of November, Kekkonen held a speech in Los Angeles and said that the note didn't actually change Finno-Soviet relations, but was more a sign of how tense the world political situation was. On 5 November after having returned to Finland, Kekkonen addressed the nation in a televised speech talking about his visit to America and how it was a success. He talked about the note crisis calling it a serious matter but something to be taken care of.

On 11 November, Kekkonen sent foreign secretary Karjalainen to Moscow to talk with his Soviet counterpart, Gromyko. Gromyko explained to Karjalainen that the Soviet military had been

³⁷ EFTA – European Free Trade Association – the Soviets initially opposed Finnish membership but after talks with Kekkonen, Finland could join without Soviet objections

³⁸ Max Jakobson, *Veteen piirretty viiva* (A line drawn in water) (Otava 1980) p.206, p. 241

demanding consultations with Finland for a long time. The leadership had resisted until they realised that Finnish foreign policy might change if “anti-Soviet forces” (Honka and his backers) got into office.

Following Karjalainen’s trip, Kekkonen dissolved parliament and new elections were set for February, right after the Presidential elections. This was not, however, a sufficient move for the Soviets.

It was then hinted to the Finns that Kekkonen should travel to Russia to meet Khrushchev. After negotiations with his ministers, Kekkonen decided to travel to Russia. A meeting with Khrushchev was set for 24 November in Novosibirsk, Siberia. The two leaders held talks and all of a sudden, Khrushchev was ready to drop demands for the consultations and give the initiative to Finland from then on. During Kekkonen’s trip, Honka, his main opponent in the upcoming elections, renounced his candidacy and Kekkonen returned to Finland as a hero. In the presidential elections of 1962, Kekkonen, without a major opponent, was re-elected with an overwhelming majority.^{39 40}

³⁹ Max Jakobson, *Veteen piirretty viiva* (A line drawn in water) (Otava 1980) p. 260-277

⁴⁰ Viktor Vladimirov, *Näin se oli* (Otava 1993) p. 115-136