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17 March 1961

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Some Possible Moves with Respect to Berlin

1. The USSR wants to eject the West from Berlin in order to strengthen the East German regime and the whole of the East European satellite system, and to deal a heavy blow to NATO and in particular to West German confidence in the US. Despite an erroneous initial appraisal in 1958 of Western reactions, and failure of a series of ultimative deadlines, the Soviets have continued to avoid direct challenges and massive encroachments due to the risks involved. While a long continued simmering agitation of the issue may wear down Western resolve, the Soviets find it frustrating and unsatisfactory to let the issue ride indefinitely without evidence of movement toward their objective. We believe that they will continue to seek to avoid risks of hostilities, but they may feel that they can safely resort to more direct pressures, and they may miscalculate the consequences of some particular means of heightened pressure.

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2. It is, therefore, important to communicate Western determination before the Soviets further commit their (and our) prestige to new initiatives based on miscalculation of our resolve. In order to forestall such Soviet pressures and perhaps to make more attractive to the USSR the alternative of shelving the Berlin issue, it is necessary to persuade the Soviets that the West in fact has, and is prepared if necessary to use, a variety of political weapons short of military measures. Political deterrents are usually necessary to deal with political challenges.

3. The Soviet leaders are hypersensitive to [redacted] [redacted] propaganda in their own camp. They recognize and probably exaggerate our potential for disruption. Consequently, any convincing communication of our intent to activate this potential would weigh seriously in their thinking. We could, for example, hint at the growing impatience of the East German people with tensions over Berlin, [redacted]

[redacted] We could more

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openly indicate that we would step up propaganda activities, and this would be relatively easy to demonstrate in increasing degree. In a broader sense, we could openly encourage (rather than as now discourage) the Republikflucht. We could publicly stress the unsettled nature of the Oder-Neisse boundary, both for its effects in East Germany and in Poland, where the government is having difficulty in permanently resettling the area.*

4. In addition to threatening or initiating disruptive influence in the East, the West could threaten to undertake certain measures to underline firmness on Berlin itself. For example, we could hint that we would demonstratively raise the strength of the Berlin garrison. We could threaten to sanction strong and open ties between West Berlin and West Germany. We could hint at or make an increase in conventional forces deployed in West Germany. We could raise vague threats of common NATO action such as an embargo of East Germany. We could hint at unloosing a massive challenge to the status of East Berlin.

* The possible gains of this move in connection with the Berlin situation would have to be weighed against the adverse effects on Poland. The Soviets might regard Western opening of the Oder-Neisse question to their advantage in solidifying Polish support. A suggestion of de facto acceptance of the Oder-Neisse line could simultaneously be offered in connection with an interim solution.

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5. The timing and tactics of such measures would be of crucial importance. The initiative should be seized before a new Soviet commitment to renewed pressure has been publicly taken. It should be accompanied by reiteration of our long standing position on the principles of a final solution for Germany and Berlin and rejection of the Soviet proposals and objectives, and in particular it should be accompanied to an offer of an indefinite "interim solution" of the Berlin problem having face-saving features for the USSR. For example, we could offer to proceed with the unilateral Western statements of intent not to station nuclear weapons or larger military forces in Berlin, and other elements of the Western position at Geneva in 1959. We could offer continued low-level (say, deputy foreign minister level) negotiations on Berlin and Germany.

6. Such an approach would have its greatest effect and hold largest promise if conveyed informally and authoritatively, with absolutely no publicity. The approach should stress that implementation of the threats would occur only if agreement could not be reached on an interim agreement. This could be done in the tone of a resort "more in sorrow than in anger." The Soviets

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would react very sharply against any public challenges to them, to any ultimative deadlines, or "declarations of cold war" in Germany. They might, however, weigh seriously a confidential US approach outlining a choice between prospects for a defensive and contested situation in Germany, and an interim solution. Not only would the threatened Western actions give pause, but they would be dramatic indication that a policy of heightened pressure would be risky. In these circumstances, the Soviets might be led to opt for our proposed interim solution, and await some future situation offering greater likelihood of American or German concession.

7. The Soviets would almost certainly test the seriousness of our threats, and it would be necessary for the West to respond. Most of the measures suggested would be suitable for application in degree propaganda, even encouragement of the refugee flow). The advantage of initial resort to measures of degree is their reversability in case of Soviet agreement. Such moves as an increase in the Berlin garrison should, therefore, probably not be made in the early stages of a campaign of Western pressure. Measures indicating NATO solidarity would be most

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problematical and difficult to arrange, but for that very reason would be effective in their impact. The West would also have to assume the possibility of adverse world reactions to certain measures which the Soviets might succeed in labelling "provocative". The chief danger would be in publicly engaging Soviet prestige under circumstances of possible Allied disunity caused by the US initiative in raising tensions.