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September 8, 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. McGEORGE DUNDY

SUBJECT: Some Additional Observations Regarding the Call-Up of Reserves: Military and Disarmament Planning

1. Call-Up of Reserves

Henry Owen tells me that consideration is again being given to the calling up of reserves and of National Guard divisions. I continue to believe that this step would be unwise for the reasons outlined in my memorandum of July 15. Let me summarize my reasons:

(a) Calling up reserves and National Guard divisions introduces additional rigidities into our posture. It may make us prisoners of a mobilization schedule; it may set up a chance for either a rapid settlement or for a final show-down. In short, it will reduce our capability to face a prolonged crisis;

(b) It will give the Soviets a psychological advantage by enabling them to "claim provocations";

(c) It seems illogical to me to build up our strength by relying on those forces whose readiness is already fairly high. The wiser course would seem to me to be to step up draft calls and increase our readiness by all means short of calling reserves. The reserves and National Guard divisions -- which I understand require only three to four months to be brought to combat effectiveness -- could then be called in as a show-down appears imminent;

(d) We require some measures as counter to Soviet provocations. Calling up reserves and National Guard divisions should be kept back as a response to such moves as harassment or interruption of air access; and

(e) I am of course in favor of pushing our build-up by all other means.

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II. Military Planning

The prime requirement seems to me to be completing our military contingency planning for Berlin. By this I mean something more than assurances by the JCS that they have matters well in hand. The plans must be such that the President understands their implications, and what is even more important, can have confidence in them.

I have serious doubts about our military planning for Berlin, as I understand it. For one thing, we still lack a plan for conventional operations that has the agreement of the Pentagon or the NATO commander, not to mention our allies. The major thrust of our build-up is, therefore, directed towards a contingency we have not adequately defined even for ourselves. Part of the reason we have failed in our stated objective of preventing Soviet miscalculation is that the rationale for our effort is not clear to them. Instead of increasing their risks, they may construe it as reducing them.

As you know, I support the conventional build-up. My objection is that it does not go far enough, and particularly that it must find its ultimate expression not so much in force levels as in military concept.

Another concern -- really a corollary of the above -- is the lack of flexibility of our nuclear response. The primary rationale for our conventional effort is to bring home to the Soviets "the unmistakable risk of general war". None of the plans for ground access that I have seen make sense unless we are prepared to face the risks of nuclear war.

However, I remain convinced that the President should not be asked to make a decision about going to nuclear war in the abstract. He should be told in detail just what his options are in the nuclear field. These options cannot possibly be improvised and they must be defined now.

I doubt seriously that we now have real flexibility in our nuclear response. The options of the SISP are all variations of one theme -- I suspect we will even have great difficulty in recalling SAC II if it should be flushed by a false alarm. For the argument will then be made that the choice is between proceeding or accepting an intolerable vulnerability while the plans are refined and overhauled.

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Civilian control over military operations may become illusory even if only conventional weapons are used under present circumstances. The President's hand may well be forced by the argument that SAC can no longer guarantee the security of his force.

This is why it is essential that the military understand now what the President is prepared to countenance and what he will not agree to. They should be ordered to produce options for a flexible nuclear response even if they do not consider it the optimum strategy.

An order by the Commander-in-Chief will mute inter-service debate. It may even be welcomed by many in the Air Force who can then invoke higher authority for doing what they believe to be necessary but what the ethos of their service inhibit now.

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III. Disarmament Planning

An urgent requirement seems to me to be to couple our military planning with disarmament planning. The following categories of plans seem to me important: (a) measures to insure that our build-up does not produce unintended war; (b) measures to enable both sides to back off from the brink of war; (c) measures to terminate a war before events get out of control; and (d) comprehensive schemes for European security should an opportunity arise suddenly for a general settlement.

Henry A. Kissinger