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DRAFT
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REVOLT IN EAST BERLIN

SUMMARY

This memorandum indicates that it may be advantageous under some circumstances for the United States, preferably with British and French co-operation, to intervene in the event of a major uprising in East Berlin, if strong Soviet forces are not positioned in the City.

The nature of city fighting is such that if the Western garrison were in position before a Soviet counter-attack, they might be costly to dislodge. That fact plus the possibility of bringing to bear other threats and promises might induce the Soviets to bargain rather than fight. In such circumstances we might be able to make some positive gains out of the crisis.

If the Communists should press the attack it should be possible to keep the level and extent of violence within pre-determined bounds. But doing so might require sacrificing the garrison. Losing the garrison would be a serious loss but it is neither forordained nor is it losing a war.

It is not clear that such a local defeat would shatter NATO. Defeat would not necessarily demonstrate weakness more clearly than would non-intervention.

In the event of a major uprising the costs of non-intervention would be large, too.

Should there be a major revolt in East Berlin there are no costless and riskless courses open to the United States. Intervention would involve

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risks of political and military loss but would have some prospect of gains without great risk of uncontrolled losses. In particular, it does not appear that the risk of general war would be significantly increased. Non-intervention would appear to involve the certainty of some political loss.

THE PROBLEM

There is at least some possibility of an uprising in East Berlin. It could arise within East Berlin or it could follow mob violence in West Berlin moving or expanding across the border. Assuming that it is not in the interest of the United States to stimulate such a riot it may still, in some cases be in our interest to intervene in its support.

In the event of revolt in East Berlin, the U.S. (and other occuping powers) could remain neutral. U.S. troops could help to pacify it -- for example, by preventing West Berliners from crossing the sector border or East Berliners from escaping. Also, the Western garrison could support it.

Supporting Insurrection

The major Soviet forces are outside Berlin. Should an insurrection begin abruptly some hours would pass before the Soviets could move into the city in force. The GDR troops and police might be able quickly to suppress the revolt. Should some of the GDR forces join the insurrection, however, considerable time might be available for Western reaction. The U.S. would have to decide whether to take the risks and costs of action or those of inaction, and it would have little time in which to make and implement its decision.

If there are several hours between a U.S. (or joint) order to act and the arrival of large Soviet units, the Western garrisons could

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presumably [1] move into East Berlin, establish some kind of perimeter and prepare to defend it. GDR opposition would slow the process and restrict the perimeter; help from defecting GDR forces and fromthe population could speed and expand them.

If the Western garrison did not react it would appear that the Soviets could regain the Eastern sector at little military cost. If, on the other hand, a large portion of East Berlin were enveloped the Russians could have all of Berlin (West as well as East) at a high price but could have none of it -- outside the perimeter -- for nothing. How high the price of retaking it would be is impossible to predict. But it could consume two to four weeks to reduce a determined garrison of 12,000 to 15,000 men with the support of the civil population. In World War II, city fighting was slow and costly.

Although fighting for Berlin would be costly to the West, it would also be costly to the Reds. The primary purposes of the move would be to change the bargaining environment and to take advantage of the change. As Western forces moved into position we should offer to negotiate. To establish an armistice for discussion we could, for example, agree not to fire on Soviet troops unless they fired or unless they crossed the ring highway or some other obvious boundary.

The parallel problem of the air corridor should be considered somewhat separate. If, prior to the unrest, Western traffic had been unrestricted, interference with that traffic would be more serious to us, and we would have somewhat greater reason than before for reacting vigorously to attempts to

1. No attempt will be made to discuss adequately the military feasibility of intervening. The question is assuming it is possible, what would be some of its consequences.

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interfere with that traffic. Similarly if air access had previously been blocked we would have somewhat increased motives for taking forceful steps to reopen it. Thus, during an armistice and discussion, the air corridor could be either open or not depending on circumstances outside the ground situation in Berlin itself.

Our declarations, our maneuvering and if necessary our fighting would have two broad aims, namely, to bring about or to support discussion rather than fighting and to achieve gains or reduce losses.

I do not know what gains the Western powers plan to seek should we achieve an advantage. Some ideas suggest themselves:

(1) An internationalized free city with no GDR rights to control the access routes west or east and with strong NATO forces in the garrison, supplemented or not by other U.N. forces;

(2) A unified free Germany, which seems unrealistic;

(3) A unified, free Germany without any foreign troops and without any nuclear weapons, which might be less unrealistic; and,

(4) The status quo ante 13 August but with no GDR rights to control access routes to the west.

No brief is made for any of these.

With our troops established in East Berlin, threatening to defend the city, we would have some powerful bargaining tools. First is the military position; there would be obvious, significant cost which the Russians would

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have to compare with the likely costs of discussion. They might even be reluctant to engage American troops directly. There are also other threats and promises we could make. We could threaten to encourage revolt elsewhere or we could promise to urge that others keep calm. We could threaten to expand the conflict through air support, theatre use of nuclears -- for example, against concentrations of Soviet forces moving in -- through a probe from West Germany, or we could offer to do none of these so long as some armistice conditions were met. Finally we could threaten general war by, for example, increasing SAC alert. (Actually, it might be wiser to signal reduced prompt strike-first capability, both to show our intention of keeping the fighting localized and to be in a better position subsequently to threaten with SAC.) There are probably other threats available.

Once negotiations were under way it might be desirable to be able to exert or to vary pressure on the Soviets. If we felt that our position deteriorated with time, we should try to make delay costly. One obvious method, if the air corridor were still open, would be to evacuate East Germans. The resumption of U-2 flights might be given consideration. (Coupled with such moves as an obvious reduction in SAC alert or a withdrawal of the Polaris fleet, such flights would constitute little or no indication of a U.S. strike and therefore would provide little rational basis for Soviet pre-emption.) Some economic measures might also impose costs of delay.

While we would want to keep the pressure such as to provide incentive for not attacking our forces in the city, we should make it clear that we were prepared to see them engaged. Clearly there is some substantial chance that the Russians might elect to attack in spite of our position and our declarations. Should they attack and find that the garrison is an effective force they might

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then be more willing to arrange for a cease-fire. It is clearly impossible to discuss whether we should be willing to accept a cease-fire with conditions such as our withdrawing to the sector line, etc.

Escalation

In the event that an attack continues and is pressed the critical problem would become whether the scope and level of violence could be controlled.

There is one type of expansion of the conflict which neither the United States nor Russia could control with certainty, namely, the spread of revolt. By declaration the United States could urge that no further revolts be started, stating, for example, that we were fully committed in Berlin and could not support insurrection elsewhere. The Russians could be counted on the threaten and to take precautionary measures, but uprisings might still occur. If there were a chance that some revolt could succeed with limited help, there might be strong motive for providing it. Whereas we might not be able to restrict the area of conflict involved in revolt we could limit American military losses simply by limiting the size of the forces we put at risk.

Leaving aside rebellion there appear to be two general ways to prevent the level of violence from increasing: to threaten to raise it to levels unacceptable to the other side; to accept loss. There is some fear that we cannot threaten central war at all without significantly increasing the risk that the Soviets will pre-empt. That fear seems to underly some of the pessimism as to our ability to take small local military action. Whereas one cannot predict precisely what would induce the Russians to pre-empt, the danger

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may be subject to control. Any threat should not deal with when the U.S. will strike the S.U. but with why. And it should make the conditions subject to Soviet control. Specifically in the present context the threat (however ambiguous) should indicate that there is no danger to the Soviets of a U.S. first strike unless they attack the Western garrison (or commit some other major aggression). In this case they have no additional motive to pre-empt and they have some motive for negotiating rather than attacking our troops.

The nuclear threat is inherent in the environment. Explicitly resorting to it unless we intended to carry through could, however, result in our bluff's being called, reducing, perhaps dangerously, the future credibility of the threat. Thus, indirection and ambiguity should characterize any such threat.

In some circumstances it may be desirable for us to increase the local fighting. In view of the isolation of Berlin and the military superiority of the Reds, certainly on the defense, some such actions might simply increase our ultimate losses. Some ways of expanding the local conflict were mentioned above. All of them carry with them, inevitably, some degree of escalation. Given the situation, it would appear that the Russians always could raise the ante beyond our reach. It is not clear that they would. It is not clear (1) because of the nuclear threat (2) because they can have no positive assurance of our unwillingness or inability to match them, and (3) because we just do not know how they reach their decisions.

At least until some very high level of violence is reached, either side can probably truncate the escalation by taking losses. In the extreme case by losing the whole force committed. Thus, we should not commit a force

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so large that we were unwilling to run substantial risk of losing it.

There are some criteria for the maximum size of such a force. First, it should be small enough that its effective elimination would not greatly ease new Communist aggression. In particular it would be essential to avoid excessively depleting the Elbe River defenses. To induce the Reds to a larger adventure would put us in the position of taking a larger local loss or having to escalate. Second, it would appear desirable that the force not contain so large a portion of the existing army of any one (small) NATO member as to change appreciably its military posture within the alliance. The Berlin garrison appears to be such a force.

If the Russians should press the attack in spite of the threats and the fighting and if at some point the United States believed it unwise to increase the level of violence we would have to be prepared to lose the garrison.

To lose the garrison might mean that it was wiped out; it might mean that in the end it surrendered. There are many reasons why we might have to lose it. A threat to penetrate the Eastern zone might be countered by a threat against Hamburg and Denmark. We would presumably be unwilling to launch general war. It would appear quite unwise to reinforce the garrison.

Losing a garrison, terrible as it is, is not losing a war.

THE COSTS

Take the worst plausible case, given that the U.S. reacts, namely, that the garrison is lost and all of Berlin is engulfed in the GDR. Is it better to have fought?

There would be obviously the very painful direct losses of our troops and of West Berlin.

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The effect on the alliance is, of course, impossible to predict. One would imagine that in West Germany the fact that the NATO powers had fought and taken a large loss when there was an option of not doing so would at least give the pro-NATO elements some strong material. Relative to the consequences of inaction in the face of revolt, we might have gained politically.

There is a notion that the British are timid in European military matters. Casual observation of history suggests that the British are not in the end easily cowed. The fighting around Berlin would have demonstrated that substantial ground action is possible in Europe without central war. The fact that the alliance (or the United States) did something, imposed costs on the Reds, denied them a free ride, would appeal to some Englishmen. Perhaps some of the reluctance to increase conventional forces would be mitigated.

DeGaulle might well prefer forceful action to inaction even at some loss. The smaller countries, after living through the long nights, would see that the United States was willing to make high the price of taking over militarily indefensible small populations. NATO might not be strengthened by commiting the garrison to support a Berlin riot if that ended in local defeat. But it is not obvious that such a defeat would shatter the alliance. It might in fact strengthen it.

If our garrison were defeated in Berlin one might argue that we had only showed our weakness. We would clearly have demonstrated that we are militarily weak there, relative to the Russians, but Berlin is patently indefensible. Further, failure to take action would suggest weakness of both force and will. Similarly one could argue that we should only fight where we can win, but this is clearly not valid.

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The costs that might be incurred through directly supporting an uprising in East Berlin are large. But it is not certain that they would be incurred. The price would also be high, if a serious revolt began and were suppressed with our making no attempt to intervene.

In addition to the direct human loss among the elements in East Berlin most in sympathy with and potentially most valuable to the West, there might be serious damage to the alliance. The fact that American, French and British troops and governments let East Berliners be cut down right at hand could damage NATO. No matter how secure our access, our rights of occupation and the formal independence of West Berlin, the city would be demoralized. If flight were possible, who would stay? Anti-NATO and anti-European forces in the FRD would be strengthened. Neither the justification for nor the realized benefits from remaining in NATO would be readily apparent to the Germans or to other NATO members. The NATO countries might still, perhaps out of fear, be willing to increase NATO's political and military strength, but it is by no means clear that they would.

Perhaps the largest cost of non-intervention would lie in reassuring the Russians. They would have had another opportunity to take actions most repugnant to our ideas with impunity, so far as our direct action is concerned. They would have had evidence that we are rational and cautious, deeply concerned with stability, even in the small, and that therefore we are predictable. There are two dangers in this. Having learned the lesson (again?) they might feel confident that they could safely proceed to affront us elsewhere. They might over-learn the lesson thus increasing world instability.

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The Possible Gains

Even in the event that intervention met with local defeat there could be some gains. Some of the costs of non-intervention would be avoided, but also there might be some positive benefits.

The Soviets might be chastened. It would be clear that we do not shy away from fighting their troops. They would have to revise any estimate that advance is cheap for them even where to delay it is costly for us. The costs of retaking a badly mauled Berlin might well exceed the gains; certainly they might appear, after the fact, to exceed the losses which might have resulted from negotiation. In general their problems of expansion and of maintaining their empire would be greatly complicated. In particular, the threat of revolt in the Satellites would loom much larger because of the fact that they could no longer be sure that only in the event of a high probability of success (and perhhaps not even then) would the West intervene.

Democratic groups in the Satellites would presumably be buoyed by the fact of Western action and depressed by Western defeat. Defeat in a militarily impossible position would certainly seem to some elements of the population to offer more hope than would failure to intervene.

Further complete defeat is by no means certain. As was mentioned, the United States would possess powerful bargaining weapons once the garrison was firmly in place. It is quite possible that the Russians would not attack or would not press the attack once they determined that we were not bluffing. In that event, we could press in the discussion for gains such as those mentioned above (p. 4). Success would bring us out of the Berlin crisis in a better local

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position than we held a year ago. The impact elsewhere might be more important.

Preparations

To be able to intervene in a major riot in East Berlin preparation is obviously required.

Clearly the garrison should be trained in house to house fighting in general and in East (as well as West) Berlin in particular. There should be various operational plans on the basis of the different perimeters which it might be possible to establish. Plans for handling civilians, using both paramilitary forces and civilian volunteers from both Sectors. Decisions as to the feasibility of seizing airports in the Eastern Zone in various circumstances, problems of interdicting Russian re-entry. In short the whole of military planning for a very specific operation whose possible employment can be foreseen.

Political planning would also be required. Conceivably one might want to give orders not to fire on GDR forces which did not react with vigor, or not to fire on Russian forces approaching the perimeter unless they fired or tried to penetrate it. Agreement at least in principle among the allies on the conditions under which the action would be undertaken as a joint venture. At least clearly defined channels should be established for prompt consultation. Decisions as to what the United States forces should do unilaterally need be made. Aims and means of bargaining need be prepared.

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