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24 April 1964

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Planning Group Meeting (23 April) - Epsilon I-64, War Game on Revolt in East Germany

Rostow declared that the critique of the game (Section G of Final Report) had been more rewarding than in other games, and had helped considerably to clarify the relevant issues and problems. SP's agenda of key questions was intended to provide a framework for pursuing the subject further.

The conversation did not get beyond the first four numbered items. Mostly it focussed on the first two with some passing reference to the fourth group of questions.

Group I Questions

Rostow explained that of course the game did not assume that violence or revolt in East Germany was likely, but it did rest on the view that the possibility was sufficiently real to be taken seriously, as well as on a recognition that if it did happen it would pose an extremely dangerous situation for us. None of the participants appeared disposed to minimize the possibility of an East German uprising. Ambassador Thompson said he believed that further deterioration in economic conditions could be a main causative factor. Another suggestion was that West Germany's military strength was now reaching a point at which East Germans might see it as strong enough to come to the aid of a revolt. In general, the sentiment seemed to be that the likelihood of a violent challenge to the East German regime was somewhat greater than the intelligence community has so far judged, though this was not explicitly stated.

I undertook to explain the reasoning which had led the intelligence people to minimize the likelihood of such a development, citing the factors which in our view would probably need to be present to bring it about. We reasoned from the precedents of the Polish and

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Hungarian events of 1956. There the following elements had figured: a profound and active discontent in the population as a whole based on both economic and political grievances; an elite (writers, intellectuals, students) which was articulating and leading dissidence; a state of deep faction within the top echelon of the Communist Party, marked by a willingness of one faction to encourage and exploit popular manifestations against the other; a consequent breakdown in regime authority which in turn further stimulated mass expectations of political change; uncertainty that the USSR would or could intervene effectively (the turmoil in the CPSU and the Communist movement generally after the 20th Congress fostered this impression in 1956).

Some of these or similar factors were present in some degree in East Germany today, but they were not all present and certainly not in what might be called critical mass. We would not exclude that some day they might be, especially if economic conditions worsened, if other East European states pursued more liberal internal policies and so widened further the gulf between themselves and the GDR, and especially if there was a new succession crisis in the USSR. By and large, the group seemed to accept this way of approaching SP's question: "What is the way in which violence is most likely to occur in East Germany?"

Group 2 Questions

General Goodpaster carried most of the discussion bearing on the Soviet capability to repress widespread disorders. He said that we probably tended to overestimate the ability of regular forces, even though large in this case, to deal with such a situation. But he conceded that everything depended on the role played by East German security and military forces. The feeling was that probably they were reliable for dealing at least with isolated disorders, but we have little or no evidence on which to base a judgment as to how they might behave in a more complicated situation.

The same uncertainty affected discussion of SP's question as to how far Soviet forces would have to be reduced to lose the capability to deal with widespread disorders. I suggested that, assuming the Soviets had confidence in the East German forces and did not anticipate revolt, they might feel that they could reduce their own strength to as little as 6 to 8 divisions, on the theory that they needed to be concerned only about that number of principal cities and could reinforce easily. Goodpaster then said that the Soviets could either suppress revolt with 6 to 8 divisions or they could not do it at all. He presumably meant to exaggerate some to make the point that the Soviets would have to act

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rapidly, in particular to prevent East German forces from going over to the revolt, if they were to avoid a very bloody involvement and increased danger of Western intervention.

Group 4 Questions

There was agreement that present contingency plans might well be reviewed and updated in the light of current judgments of the situation in East Germany and probable conduct of the West Germans in the assumed case. The plans were not discussed in detail; I and others there were not privy to them. Evidently they are keyed generally to the aim of avoiding involvement by our own or West German forces. (This was also the primary aim pursued by the Blue team in the game). Interest was expressed in an inquiry as to whether our forces have the capabilities and are so located as to be able to prevent border clashes. Goodpaster stressed that it was impossible for either ourselves or the Soviets to position enough troops to seal off the border. There was agreement with my observation that the Berlin Wall was likely to be an immediately critical area, but not altogether with the further point that there would probably be considerably less danger on the East-West German border.

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Rostow said he found the discussion "refreshing" and proposed to schedule a longer afternoon session to pursue the remaining questions on SP's list.

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