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McGB

Nuclear Weapons and Berlin

As I read the press, I become increasingly concerned lest too exclusive an emphasis on "conventional" build-up may tend to erode the credibility of our posture on Berlin. Despite the obvious good sense of the Acheson doctrine that in a nuclear stalemate we cannot respond initially with massive retaliation, to convey too strong a public impression that we will only react conventionally before we have really acquired a capability to do so will not carry much conviction in Moscow. Indeed it may have the opposite result.

I fully agree that our actual Berlin responses should be conventional. What I query is whether in our statements and actions leading up to this point we should over-stress this fact. Largely because of his substantial conventional superiority, Khrushchev will not be very impressed by modest increases in our non-nuclear strength. His contemptuous remarks to the British Ambassador about one French division coming back from Algeria, and his boast that he could mobilize 300, probably reflect his real feelings.

What we hope will scare him, of course, is fear that if a major fracas erupts in Germany, he will be started down a slippery slope which might lead to nuclear war. But conventional preparations, without keeping the nuclear threat alive in the background, may actually confirm to Khrushchev that we dare not use the very weapons which would scare him most. He may well interpret our remarks and preparations as meaning that we are in fact afraid to use nuclears in the clutch.

Premature emphasis on conventional to the exclusion of nuclear forces may also weaken our credibility to our allies. We have been telling them for years that our NATO nuclear capability was the great equalizer, and our success in selling this doctrine is amply evident in their less than enthusiastic responses to the Acheson doctrine. If we make it too patently apparent that our responses will be only conventional, we may fail to convince our allies that we will go to the wall if necessary over Berlin. As you know, they already fear that our

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new non-nuclear emphasis means we are no longer willing to use our nuclear "sword".

What can we do about this? *Revise civil defense prog, etc.*

Low Key Reminders of Our Nuclear Strength. Let me record again my conviction that our present tactical nuclear stockpiles in Europe (particularly in shorter range weapons) are substantially in excess of those of the Soviets. Khrushchev may say he doesn't think much of tactical weapons, but this is largely because he doesn't have too many yet. Soviet stockpiles are not yet sufficient to permit a major tactical weapons build-up on top of equipping their strategic forces (which naturally had first priority). Hence Khrushchev is probably still frightened of tactical nuclear war, despite his claims that any nuclear war would quickly become all-out (a smart thing for him to say during a period of his tactical inferiority). He is no more anxious than we to see a tactical nuclear war escalate into Armageddon.

Ergo, in demonstrating our determination in the test of wills over Berlin, we should not talk exclusively of conventional build-ups, even though conventional responses are all we actually contemplate. Mr. Gilpatric at his press conference seemed rather feeble on this score. Low key reminders of our current strategic nuclear superiority, and above all of our great tactical superiority, would dilute the non-nuclear focus, worry Khrushchev, and reassure our allies. Indeed, we might even deploy a few more nucs to Europe just to give balance to our public stance.

Threatening to Give Nucs to Bonn. These are dangerous days, and if we accept Mr. Acheson's precept that the stakes are absolutely crucial, can we shy away even from contingency plans for rattling nucs? On this score, Khrushchev might turn green if we threatened to give nuclear weapons to the Germans. I'd be no happier about this than anyone else. But at a late stage in a Berlin crisis, why not tell Khrushchev discreetly that if faced with such a crucial threat to our whole position in Western Europe we would feel compelled to provide our allies with whatever means were necessary to defend their vital interests?

Resumption of Nuclear Testing. Another way of reminding Khrushchev of the nuclear threat lurking in the background would be the resumption, at some stage in the crisis, of US nuclear tests. It is a fair bet that

Khrushchev hopes he's put us in a box where we are unwilling to incur the onus of abrogating even an unpoliced moratorium. For us to test, and to incur this onus, would further validate our determination to go to war if necessary. It would also refocus attention on the nuclear stakes involved. Such a step would add to an already tense situation, but at least it would not be open to miscalculation.

*Have talked to [unclear] and by [unclear] through [unclear]*

Nuclear Demonstrations. If worst comes to worst, and we find ourselves at the brink on Berlin, certain high-risk options which now seem almost incredible might begin to look worthwhile. Let's say we are already in a substantial conventional fracas on the approaches to Berlin. At the eleventh hour we face defeat, negotiated compromise, or general war. But there is a further alternative which might be sandwiched into an ascending level of violence. I would call this a "controlled nuclear demonstration" of a very limited sort.

If things got to the point where the Soviets were licking us on the ground in Germany, they clearly would be gambling that we would not actually use nuclear weapons. The problem at this point would be to convince them, but by means short of all-out or even tactical nuclear war. This might involve the highly selective use of nuclear weapons as a demonstration of will.

One possibility might be to use a very few battlefield nuclear weapons in the conventional fracas, perhaps telegraphing our punch to minimize civilian casualties and avoid Soviet miscalculation. Another possibility might be to actually fire an ICBM [redacted] as a demonstration that we could face up to a nuclear exchange. Once again we would tell the Soviets just beforehand what we intended to do.

I'm under no illusion as to the critical risks involved. Their escalation potential is great. They might petrify some allies. And two can play at this game. But remember that these steps would take place only when we were at the very brink of all-out war. They are suggested as last ditch alternatives which postpone an all-out response in the hope that they would forestall the necessity for it.

True, they might provoke a Soviet first strike but we are already in so tense a situation that the risk of preemption has become almost

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a constant; in any case we would be at full readiness. If firing a few nuclear weapons seems horrendous to contemplate, it seems less so to me than firing thousands. Hence, I urge some contingency planning to see what we might drum up.

RLX.  
EWK

cc: HO