

MJHillenbrand

## DEPARTMENT OF STATE

*Memorandum of Conversation*TOP SECRET
 DATE: November 21, 1961  
 TIME: 5:00 P.M.  
 PLACE: Cabinet Room -  
 White House

SUBJECT: Berlin Contingency Planning

PARTICIPANTS: UNITED STATES
 The President  
 Secretary Rusk  
 Secretary McNamara  
 Mr. Dulles  
 Mr. Kohler  
 Mr. Witze  
 General Lemnitzer  
 Ambassador Dowling  
 Mr. Bundy  
 Mr. Hillenbrand
GERMANY
 Chancellor Adenauer  
 Foreign Minister Schroeder  
 Defense Minister Strauss  
 Dr. Carstens  
 Ambassador Grewe  
 General Schneeg

## COPIES TO:

The present conversation flowed over from the exchange which took place at the end of the restricted military briefing given at 4:00 to Chancellor Adenauer and the German Foreign Minister and Defense Minister.

Defense Minister Strauss commented that the figures for Soviet ground strength given during the briefing obviously did not jibe with those which have been disseminated at NATO. British and American officers in Paris have spoken of 130 to 140 Soviet divisions, and the figure of 180 divisions had become so fixed in NATO thinking that anyone who claimed it to be too high was automatically labeled an optimist. Now the US had given a figure which was one half as large as that considered obligatory in NATO. He recognized that sometimes inflated figures are given in order to encourage the NATO countries to more effort, but he felt that it was urgently necessary to discuss the new US figures and to arrive at a commonly-agreed estimate. This should be a priority matter for the Chiefs of Staff of the NATO Military Committee which would be meeting in Paris in December. One of the implications of the larger figure commonly used was that it meant the nuclear threshold had to be very low. Other data which required correction were those commonly accepted for comparative tank strength. The President observed that the relative equipment of the Soviet and Western divisions and their size also needed to be compared. Strauss said that the Soviet divisions in the GDR are essentially assault divisions and that they lack infantry. Although they have more artillery and tanks than NATO divisions, the strength of the Soviet divisions is roughly 9,000 to 10,000 as compared to the 15,000 in the standard NATO divisions. This meant that the Soviet divisions would be weak on the defensive. If the new US figures for Soviet divisional strength were correct, then instructions should be issued to NATO commanders so that the

TOP SECRET

defense line would no longer be along the Weser-Lech Line but on the basis of a more forward strategy. He recognized that the US troops operated on the basis of a forward strategy now, but this was not true of the British Army of the Rhine or of the French forces. Secretary McManara said he agreed the figures needed refinement. The total of 170-180 Soviet divisions is obviously excessive. He also agreed that modification of NATO plans should be based upon a more realistic estimate of Soviet strength plus the fact of the recent NATO build-up.

The President said that when we stressed the desirability of a build-up of conventional forces, we had aroused doubts as to our intentions regarding the use of our nuclear force. He wondered what Strauss' thoughts were on this subject. Strauss said that no one in Europe had so great an interest as the Germans in avoiding a thermonuclear war. His Government favored balanced collective forces including a strong conventional component. It had always rejected the Radford theory and General Heusinger had been sent to Washington on a special mission in 1956, when the so-called Radford Plan was being discussed, to emphasize the need for a strong conventional component in NATO forces. The Federal Republic is not "nuclear-obsessed" - a term which the Defense Minister had heard for the first time from an American. The Federal Government did, however, support the concept of a credible deterrent as the chief objective of NATO. It opposed the idea that the opponents could safely operate within the nuclear threshold, knowing how far they could go without nuclear retaliation. The other side should never know where the nuclear threshold is. We live in Europe because of the impossibility of war not because of the possibility of conventional war. Even large-scale conventional war would be disastrous for Europe under current conditions.

The President asked whether, based on his information, he believed NATO should build up enough conventional forces to defend Germany without nuclear weapons. Strauss said that Worstad was supposed to have at least 30 divisions on the central front. Assuming these 30 divisions to be really there and using only conventional means, NATO would be able to resist the Soviet divisions now in the GDR. It could not cope with Soviet reserves or interdict the movement of these reserves forward. He pointed out that, even with the 12 full German divisions in the line, the state of the French divisions was such that NATO would not really have the 30 full divisions of which he had spoken.

General Lemnitzer said he agreed that there was a great disparity in estimates regarding the number of Soviet divisions, particularly for those in central Europe. Our estimate was that there were 55 in all the latter area whereas the German estimate was 70 and 9 Satellite divisions. This discrepancy had to be worked out in the Military Committee and as Chairman he would see that it was. He did not believe however that all these Soviet divisions could be used against the NATO shield. Large forces were tied down in rear area defense. Moreover, our nuclear capability in Europe was very great. We would like to see 30 divisions on the central front. This would provide a difficult military problem for the Soviets in central Europe. If the Soviets moved westward their lines of communication would be very vulnerable. The question of when we would employ nuclear weapons could only be determined under the circumstances at the time.

Defense Minister Strauss said he welcomed the fact that one of the effects of the Berlin crisis had been to achieve the NATO force goals which had been established for non-Berlin crisis conditions. It was hazardous to think that with the divisional strength indicated NATO could fight a conventional war. The Soviets were traditionally willing to expend men and material, and would not be inhibited from doing so if this would achieve their objectives. Hence the German position that, if the West had to commit more than one division, there should be a selective use of nuclear weapons and then full-scale nuclear war. Khrushchev regards himself as the consummation of the Communist revolution. He had attacked the Stalinists for their adventuresome policy. He knows that a nuclear war would mean the end of the central leadership system in the Soviet Union, and he fears this. In the last few years the credibility of the Western nuclear deterrent has suffered. Perhaps the talks of the Secretary and of the President with Gromyko had increased this once again.

Chancellor Adenauer said he saw the problem in somewhat simpler terms. If no agreement were reached on Berlin in negotiations, the Soviets would take West Berlin within 48 hours, and one hour thereafter they could be in Hamburg; Munich was only 80 kilometers from the East German border. The Soviets would have deployed troops to achieve these objectives, while NATO forces stayed at their same level. The Soviets would bring up all the forces they required. Therefore, he said the situation was very serious. The President said he did not doubt that, if the events described took place, we would be in a nuclear war. The seizure of Berlin would be enough to trigger off such a war. He could not see the Soviets giving up the advantage of a first strike by providing this kind of warning, the nuclear situation being what it is now. He thought they would either cut off access to the autobahn or in the air.

The Chancellor asked if he believed that, if the Soviets occupied West Berlin and Hamburg and Munich, that the Italians or other NATO countries would want to fight. The President said the important point was whether the Germans, the Americans, the British and the French would be willing to resist. He asked what, in his judgment, would be the German view if it were realized that use of nuclear weapons by the US would lead to the destruction of Germany. Chancellor Adenauer said he had seen from the military briefing that Western Europe was the target of the main Soviet nuclear strength. Western Europe would indeed be destroyed. Would the Europeans be of a mind to do much fighting under these conditions?

Strauss said he wished to summarize. It was agreed that the Norstad build-up proposals, as agreed by the Foreign Ministers in Paris, must be carried out. If the access routes to Berlin are blockaded because negotiations failed or because they have not taken place, the Western Powers would try to win time by creating an air bridge, though admittedly this would not solve the problem. The Western Powers would make the three kinds of probes contemplated to sound out Soviet intentions. However, the considerations mentioned by Chancellor Adenauer regarding the destruction of Europe had led the Germans to put forward proposals on the use of sea and naval action. Once land and air forces are locked in combat it would be difficult to control the development of the situation. The Allies would then develop action involving up to one

TOP SECRET

division to give the Soviets a final chance. Thereafter the West should make a preemptive strike. Such a program would give the West time for negotiations and other possible actions before facing a decision whether or not to give up Berlin. To give it up would be a major political and moral defeat. Such a flexible approach using every means available before the ultimate confrontation is essential. It is also essential that the West avoid, through airing of differences, encouraging Khrushchev to think that the Alliance is falling apart. If Khrushchev will not be persuaded by such a process, then he is obviously prepared to have a show-down anyway.

Chancellor Adenauer said he agreed with Strauss. A naval blockade would be a serious warning to the Soviets. He did not know why the British were so opposed to it. The West was far superior at sea. The President commented that the British were on such a narrow ledge as far as the financial situation was concerned that they were fearful of the effects of a blockade. Secretary McNamara said there was also a question of the efficacy of a blockade. It was a useful tool and should be used at a certain point. He believed the Germans would be interested to know that we had reactivated 40 destroyers and taken other measures specifically to add to our naval blockade capabilities. We considered this such a potentially useful measure that we were prepared to undertake it if the necessity arose. The Chancellor observed that the US and Germany supported the idea but the British objected.

The President asked whether the Germans had any reaction to our MRBM offer as contained in his Ottawa speech. Strauss said that there was not a unified European attitude. He did not think that NATO as a whole could meet the President's request for suggestions on the control problem. The Italians, the Benelux, the Federal Republic, Greece and Turkey would support such a move, and the Federal Republic would soon make proposals as to how it might be translated into reality. Neither the French nor the British were interested, for different reasons. The Germans would make their proposals in the NATO meeting in December. He hoped to discuss certain details with Secretary McNamara during his present visit to Washington.