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20 October 1961

U. S. Policy on Military Actions in a Berlin Conflict

= NSAM 109

In the event military force is applied in the Berlin situation, it is United States policy that the nature and sequence of such use should preferably be:

- I If Soviet/GDR administrative or other action interferes with Berlin access by ground or air but is short of definitive blockage, then the tripartite powers should execute Berlin contingency plans, to include tripartitely agreed probes of Soviet intentions by a platoon or smaller force on the ground and by fighter escort in the air; they should continue to use fully any unblocked mode of access.

(COMMENT: Through this point, risks of major war, unless Soviets wish to start one, are not materially raised by any tripartite action, and therefore, decision on execution is tripartite rather than NATO responsibility.)

- II If, despite the above tripartite actions, Soviet/GDR action indicates a determination to maintain significant blockage of our access to Berlin, then the NATO Allies should undertake such non-combatant activity as economic embargo, maritime harassment, and UN action. Simultaneously, they should mobilize and reinforce rapidly to improve capability for taking actions listed below. Meanwhile, they should use fully any unblocked access to Berlin. (If, however, the situation has so developed that NATO forces have been substantially reinforced, after appropriate non-combatant measures undertake without delay one or more of the courses of military action shown below.)

(COMMENT: Since the Alliance proposes to exploit other means before initiating major military operations, non-combatant efforts to restore ground access will precede the military efforts shown below in any case. A separate issue is the choice between delay while reinforcing in Europe, and prompt action. Without a build-up by the Allies, the range of options for early military action by us is limited. Undue delay could weaken nuclear credibility, threaten the viability of West Berlin, and erode Alliance resolve, but these potential disadvantages may be outweighed by the higher risk of nuclear escalation if early non-nuclear action were taken with no more than the currently available forces. To the extent that Alliance forces in Europe are raised above present levels, the delays in initiating military action can be reduced or the military action can be tailored to the existing force levels.)

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III. If, despite the above Allied actions, our Berlin access is not restored, the Allies should take appropriate further action to clarify whether the Soviets/GDR intend to maintain blockage of air or ground access, or both, while making clear our intention to obtain re-opened access. Then embark on one or more of the following expanded military courses of action:

A. European Theatre

1. Expanding non-nuclear air action, against a background of expanded ground defensive strength, to gain local air superiority. Extend size and scope as necessary.

(Comment: Opposing strengths probably will be roughly comparable. Military success locally is not impossible. As a political operation, this shows the Soviets visibly higher risks of nuclear war. The pace and volatility of extended air operations raise risks of rapid escalation.)

2. Expanding non-nuclear ground operations into GDR territory in division and greater strength, with strong air support.

(Comment: This is a politically oriented military operation aiming to display to the Soviets the approaching danger of possibly irreversible escalation. Military overpowering of determined Soviet resistance is not feasible. The risks rise, as do the military pressures on the Soviets.)

B. World Wide

Maritime control, naval blockade, or other world-wide measures, both for reprisal and to add to general pressure on the Soviets.

(Comment: This action, by itself, is not apt to be effective and might lead to Soviet initiation of action on the European central front in any case. It lacks direct relation to Berlin and may entail political liabilities. It exploits pronounced Allied naval superiority. It would have a delayed impact on nuclear risks. It is the view of the JCS and the principal unified commanders that a naval blockade should be accompanied by other military action in Central Europe.]

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IV. If, despite Allied use of substantial non-nuclear forces, the Soviets continue to encroach upon our vital interests, then the Allies should use nuclear weapons, starting with one of the following courses of action but continuing through C below if necessary:

A. Selective nuclear attacks for the primary purpose of demonstrating the will to use nuclear weapons.

B. Limited tactical employment of nuclear weapons to achieve in addition significant tactical advantage such as preservation of the integrity of Allied forces committed, or to extend pressure toward the objective.

C. General Nuclear war.

(Comment: The Allies only partially control the timing and scale of nuclear weapons use. Such use might be initiated by the Soviets, at any time after the opening of small-scale hostilities. Allied initiation of limited nuclear action may elicit a reply in kind; it may also prompt unrestrained pre-emptive attack.)

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