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Phase III

In Phase III, the questions all turn around this general problem: what form of interference with access to Berlin triggers what form of response? These questions are very hard ones, and the consensus of the Steering Group yesterday was that they need not have first priority attention for the coming meeting. But as General Taylor points out, it is going to be important to have a clear view on some of these issues fairly soon, and certainly before any Western summit we should have views of our own and they should have been argued in the appropriate forum—possibly that of the Defense Ministers.

McG. B.³

³Printed from a copy that bears these typed initials.

92. Record of Meeting

Washington, August 3, 1961, 4:30 p.m.

PRESENT

The President, the Secretary of State, Mr. Owen

1. The Secretary said that he hoped in Paris to (i) secure allied agreement to the military build-up; (ii) clinch preparations for economic sanctions; (iii) get a coordinated NATO propaganda effort into high gear.
2. The Secretary spoke of the possibility of an early instruction to Thompson to make a quiet approach to Khrushchev. One object would be to get Khrushchev engaged in a discussion of the access question. This object might better be achieved in private rather than in a formal talk.
3. The Secretary said that by the end of this month he thought the Western powers would be in a position to propose a Four Power For-

Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Meetings and Memoranda Series, Meetings with the President. Secret. No drafting information appears on the source text. Published in part in *Declassified Documents*, 1986, 2258.

eign Ministers' Conference. That Conference might take place in early October or early November. A meeting of the Heads of Western governments immediately concerned should take place beforehand in Bermuda.

4. The Secretary said that he hoped not to get very far into the content of our negotiating position in discussions at Paris. He did not think this was the time to press the Germans into making concessions on either the German or European security questions—particularly in view of the upcoming elections. The President agreed, suggesting that the French and Germans would have to get the wind up before they were moved to give us the flexibility we will need on some issues in order to get the better guarantee of access we want. He thought that Ambassador Kennan's suggestions¹ made sense but that this was not the time to push our allies. The Secretary suggested that we might be able to make some progress just by asking our allies the right questions. He reported German Defense Minister Strauss' remark to Mr. Acheson²—that the Germans have not yet faced up to the risk of war over Berlin; he thought that they will be more flexible when they do. The President added that our allies' negotiating mood may also mellow when they are asked to undertake costly military preparations.

5. The President asked what our counter-proposal to Khrushchev should be. The Secretary said that our initial proposal should be for a change in the status quo in our favor, to balance the change that Khrushchev is seeking in his favor. This would prepare the way for later hard bargaining.

6. The President asked about Solution "C". The Secretary described it as a series of reciprocal declarations between Western powers and the Communists, in which both sides would reserve their juridical positions and agree to preserve the physical status quo except for replacement of Soviet by East German personnel along the access routes. The Secretary said that we could not prevent Khrushchev from signing a treaty but we might be able to build up enough resistance thus to deter him from blocking our access after a treaty.

7. The Secretary said there was one point on which he wanted to make his position clear to the President before his discussions at Paris. Shooting should be an act of last resort; non-military means (e.g., an air-lift and sanctions) should be exhausted first. Even a small probe could quickly get out of control.

8. The President suggested that a Defense Ministers' meeting be held at the end of August. He mentioned, as one of the questions which

¹ Not further identified.

² See footnote 5, Document 77.

would require decision at some point, whether aircraft should be maintained in a state of non-nuclear readiness. In this case, a delay of several hours would have to ensue before they could use nuclear weapons, instead of a comparable delay before they could use iron bombs, as at present.

9. The Secretary said that while in Paris he would visit the NATO Council with the Attorney General. After Paris he would go to Italy to see Segni. He would write to the Greek and Turkish Foreign Ministers from Paris. The President thought well of the British suggestion that the Secretary come home by way of London.

10. The Secretary intended that Ambassadors Bruce, Dowling, Thompson, and Kennan constitute a standing group to provide ideas on Berlin. Kennan would also be keeping in touch with neutrals. The Belgrade meeting of neutral nations was briefly covered.³

11. Tripartite consultation would take place in Washington. The Secretary would consult with the two Ambassadors; French and British members of the Standing Group would be brought in, as appropriate. This may not satisfy the French; they will have to be convinced that we meant what we said when we suggested that discretion would be needed.

12. The President asked about the possibility of a plebiscite in Berlin. The Secretary said that he would discuss this with the Foreign Ministers in Paris. The President suggested that we might have to indicate our willingness to abide by the results. There was some discussion of how to phrase the question so that it would favor neither side. The President rather liked: "Mr. Khrushchev has made a proposal for changing the status of Berlin. Do you support this?"

13. The President mentioned Senator Case's letter dealing with the possibility of a canal from Czechoslovakia.⁴

14. It was agreed that the decision to propose a Four Power Foreign Ministers' meeting in early October should not be firmly taken in Paris, but should be referred to the Heads of Governments. The danger of leaks would thus be minimized.

15. It was agreed that the U.S. would ease off its present position on paper stamping, letting the UK carry the ball with the French and Germans. This allied decision should be made known later in the year, in advance of a treaty, e.g., in November or December. Meantime, we could see if it could be traded for something from the Soviets.

³ The Conference of Non-Aligned Countries was scheduled to be held in Belgrade September 2–6.

⁴ Not found.

16. The President mentioned the likely difficulty of persuading de Gaulle and Adenauer to our proposed positions at a Western Heads of Government meeting. The Secretary suggested that, in the end, de Gaulle would probably go along with our proposals, if the President indicated that they were essential to preserve our position in Berlin.

17. There was some discussion of propaganda themes. The President did not think much of the “defaulting trustee” theme. The Secretary said that our propaganda would be geared to the main themes in the President’s speech,⁵ which was being widely translated and circulated.

18. The Secretary said that we should try now to keep Berlin out of the UN, where we would lack support as a result of Bizerte. We would have to take Berlin to the UN, however, if there were a peace treaty and moves were made against our access.

19. The discussion turned away from Berlin:
[Here follow six paragraphs on other topics.]

⁵ See Document 81.

93. Editorial Note

On July 27 a U.S. Delegation, led by Assistant Secretary of State Kohler and including Legal Adviser Chayes, Director of the Office of German Affairs Hillenbrand, Under Secretary of the Treasury Fowler, and Assistant Secretary of Defense Nitze, flew to Paris for a week of meetings with representatives of France, the United Kingdom, and the Federal Republic of Germany to lay the groundwork for the Foreign Ministers meeting beginning August 5. At its first meeting this Four-Power Working Group agreed on the following order of business: 1) Political problems; 2) Politico-military problems; 3) Economic phases of contingency planning; and 4) Information program.

The U.S. memorandum on Berlin, which was distributed to the other Western powers on July 21 (see Document 79), served as the basis for discussion.

By August 2 the Working Group had drafted a report on Soviet motives and intentions; reached general agreement, although the French and Germans had doubts, that negotiations with the Soviet Union