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TEXT OF MESSAGE

Dear Foster,

I saw Selwyn last night and found him better but he is still not back at work. In his absence, I have been reading the accounts of the discussions which our officials have been having both with and without the French. I am bound to say I think we have got a little bogged down by the old question of which comes first - the egg or the chicken, the making of a plan or the decision to carry it out. In my view we ought to study the implications of all kinds of military plans without necessarily deciding upon them. In this country a decision cannot be taken without a full Cabinet. However, I think the firm line that the great Powers and NATO took has clearly had some effect upon the Russians and I am all for a strong posture in public.

All the same I do not think that it has been the Russian intention to impose a blockade at the end of the six months. Their intention has been to make us choose between imposing a blockade on ourselves or dealing with the East Germans, whether as their successors or their agents. But they now seem to be a little alarmed that their Note should appear to the Western world as having directly threatened a blockade. I was most grateful to you for sending me such a long account of what Mikoyan said to you.

A strong posture in public and the study of plans to support it is a good thing, but you and I should be seriously considering how we can get, as I believe we may, two advantages:

- (a) ☒ An apparent Russian retreat because the world believes they have threatened us with blockade and the more we talk about plans to overcome it the better it will be outwardly.
- (b) Being able to force the Russians by negotiation, or at any conference, to accept responsibility to see that the West's military and civil supplies do in fact get through. In other words, if they hand over to the D. D. R., as successors or agents, they must still see to it that the D. D. R. behaves properly. In the Note I think they threatened that they would support the D. D. R. if we attacked them. But if they stand behind the D. D. R. in this way, the corollary surely is that the Russians should see to

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It that the D. D. R. carry out their obligations including those which the Russians purport to hand over to them.

I should be very grateful for your views.

[Meanwhile, I am all for military planning to meet any situation but the decision whether to take action either in actual use of force or in the preliminary mobilisation is one which we could not take without a full exploration of all its implications.]

As ever,

Harold

This letter was sent under cover of a letter from Chargé d'Affairs Hood dated January 8, 1959.

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