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March 5, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONFERENCE WITH THE PRESIDENT  
March 5, 1959 - 10:17 AM (Special Meeting after regular NSC Meeting)

Others present: Vice President Nixon  
Secretary Herter  
Secretary Anderson  
Secretary McElroy  
Attorney General Rogers  
General Twining  
Mr. Allen Dulles  
Mr. Merchant  
Mr. George Allen  
Governor Hoegh  
Mr. Gordon Gray  
Mr. James Lay  
General Persons  
General Goodpaster  
Major Eisenhower



The purpose of this meeting was to discuss contingency planning in the Berlin crisis. At the meeting of January 29th an initial plan had been formulated which included measures which might be taken, up to and including the eventuality of a small probe between Helmstedt and Berlin. In the event that this probe were stopped by force, it had then been decided that we should marshal world opinion on preparing for general war.

The President opened this meeting by expressing the view that our courses of action to implement this general design to marshal public opinion and prepare for war have not been sufficiently clarified. Specifically, he is suspicious of the capability of the United Nations to afford positive action commensurate with the dire situation once one of our convoys has been stopped by the GDR. He felt that we have not placed enough thought on ways to make the Soviets the aggressor in this case. The President asked the Departments of State and Defense how far the question has been thought through.

Secretary Herter, in response, referred to the January 29th contingency paper and stated that our tripartite working group in Bonn is refining it. There are, in his view, some doubtful points, as brought up by the

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President, namely:

(1) The British position relative to the permissibility of GDR officials placing a "date stamp" on convoy identification papers. He feels the British would not be willing to go to war over the principle of paper stamping. However, the Germans have pointed out that such an act, insignificant in itself, would be the beginning of a "slippery slope."

(2) The utility of the United Nations in this connection. The working group at Bonn has asked our delegation in New York to canvass the United Nations for its attitude. In this connection, Ambassador Lodge has pointed out the great utility of the United Nations for maintaining any status quo.

The President agreed as to the usefulness of the United Nations maintaining a status quo situation but specified that its usefulness would be confined to the period between now and the termination of the ultimatum rather than to the period in which the crisis had become acute. The President went on to refer to a paper submitted to him this morning suggesting a naval blockade of the North Sea as a countermeasure against stopping of Berlin convoys. He expressed disagreement with the concept, primarily because it would allow time to continue working on the side of the Soviets. In other words, if we took no action other than a blockade, we would be applying pressure which would be effective only after a considerable time, whereas Berlin would very quickly shrivel. Secretary Herter pointed out that this paper had represented only a request for a study, and not a policy determination.

The President then questioned the recognition status of the GDR in the neutralist world. Specifically, he desired to compare the status of the GDR with that of the Federal Republic. To this Secretary Herter answered that Yugoslavia is the only nation which has recognized the GDR other than the Soviets, and further pointed out that talk of a peace treaty with the GDR on the part of the Soviets is invalid. A peace treaty between the USSR and the GDR already exists; any action to which Khrushchev might refer would be merely the relinquishment of certain rights which have been reserved in their current treaty.

Secretary Herter then referred to a report over the ticker tape of a statement by Khrushchev on possible extension of the May 27th deadline; but the President dismissed this statement largely as propaganda.

Secretary Herter then brought up the question of the extent and the timing of a conscious effort to be made to impress the American people with the

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fact that the situation in Berlin is more serious than public reaction to it would indicate. On this question two opposing considerations manifest themselves. One, expressed by Secretary McElroy, was that excessive efforts in this direction might cause an excess of concern on the part of the public. This viewpoint was reinforced later by Secretary Anderson who is of the opinion that the public is more concerned about this crisis than we might realize. The other consideration is that actions to prepare the public for possible dire possibilities must be expedited. In this connection, Secretary Dulles has previously expressed the view that the public realization is not adequate.

The matter of indicating the concern of the government over this crisis brought up two specific problems. One was the announcement of this meeting itself with the objective of indicating to the public that the matter is being considered by members of the National Security Council. After discussion, the President agreed that an announcement should be made that he had called a special National Security Council meeting to address the Berlin crisis. In connection with this, he requested Mr. Gordon Gray to explain the matter to Mr. Stans and Dr. Libby, the two members absent.

The other matter growing out of the question of publicity was that of Congressional relations. This matter was brought up by General Persons and was reinforced by Mr. Nixon. In Mr. Nixon's view, the objective which the President has been following as to his public position is to appear firm without being provocative. Mr. Nixon cited the rejection of immediate mobilization as a sign of the President's desire not to be provocative. In Mr. Nixon's view, however, there is a segment in Congress and in the press which will criticize an alleged lack of firmness. He feels, therefore, that meetings such as the Leadership meeting proposed by General Persons and announcement of today's meeting would be useful in this respect. With relation to the Congressional Leaders, Mr. Nixon pointed out that some of these people have shown great restraint. He feels that the bipartisan atmosphere would be increased by any meeting in which Congressional Leaders were made to feel a greater share in this matter.

The President agreed to the principle of a meeting with Congressional Leaders, but explained his reticence to hold such a meeting on the basis of Mr. Macmillan's impending visit to the United States later this month. He pointed out the changeability of the positions of various leaders in the allied world. Specifically, he referred to that of Adenauer. Adenauer has shown considerable evidence of weakening his initial position on such matters as stamping of papers by the GDR. The main reason why the

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United States has taken a firm if not rigid position on the inadmissibility of stamping of documents by the GDR is to support Adenauer. In recent meetings it has been reported that Adenauer has given assent to a fall-back position of permitting such activities by GDR officials. (Secretary Herter noted that Adenauer is in poor physical condition at the moment and is sustaining serious defections within his own party.) The President's purpose in referring to the change in Adenauer's position is that he visualizes the possibility of some change in his own position after the Macmillan visit. Essentially, he feels that Macmillan's visit will not bring forth much of a substantive nature, but he considers the possibility sufficient to make him hesitant about prematurely disclosing plans to Members of Congress.

At the urging of the Vice President and General Persons, the President decided to hold a meeting with Congressional Leaders both before and after the Macmillan visit. Considerable discussion then ensued relative to the details. The President's decision in this matter was to meet with Congressional Leaders on Friday, March 6th, inviting Senators Johnson and Dirksen, and Representatives Rayburn and Halleck. He feels that he can see Senator Fulbright informally later on. Present from the Executive Branch should be Secretary Herter, Mr. McElroy, and the Vice President. The purpose of the meeting should be primarily to allow the Members of Congress to express their views on the Berlin situation and to outline to them the general tack and the general posture that the United States desires to present before the world on this matter. During the discussion, Secretary Herter pointed out the danger of too much discussion of diplomatic tactics. Not only are these tactics not yet firm, but any matters which might leak as the result of such a meeting would have a serious effect on our flexibility in dealing with the Soviets.



Other matters brought up in the meeting were:

- (1) Military actions which are being or have been taken.

This was given to the meeting by General Twining and included primarily actions to reinforce our security situation in the short run as well as to indicate preparations to the Soviets. The President issued one caution on these matters: that nothing should be attempted which could be detected as a phony. General Twining also outlined other proposals such as a slight buildup in Army forces, the movement of the Second Fleet to the

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North Atlantic, and positioning of an additional TAC rotational unit at Adana. The President approved the principle of implementing such actions for psychological purposes, but evidenced some shock at the idea of moving an additional division to Europe. (These actions are all included in the enclosure to this memorandum.)

(2) The size of force necessary to hold open ground access routes to Berlin.

The President pointed out in this connection that any military operation to open ground accesses will be a major operation which he estimates as three to four corps. He pointed out the infeasibility of holding one highway open without considerable territory on either side of it. In his view, it is nearly a matter of general war once military action of any sort is opened.

(3) The question of movement of dependents to Berlin.

This matter was brought up by General Persons. General Twining expressed the view that we should stop all flow of dependents to Berlin as of now. While not fully committing himself, the President did admit that such an action would reduce the numbers that might have to be evacuated at a future date.

(4) Difficulties which might be encountered with the attitude of the allies.

The President again pointed out the absolute necessity for concurrence of the French and the Germans in our actions, in that we cannot fight a battle without a line of communication. He further touched on the difficulties which would accrue from a marked softening of attitude on the part of Willy Brandt. Willy Brandt has been somewhat receptive to the idea of internationalizing Berlin and has been inconsistent in his positions. The President pointed out that it would be untenable for us to be placed in a position where we are saving people who do not desire to be saved.



*John S D Eisenhower*  
John S. D. Eisenhower

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