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(Drafting Office and Officer)

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

Memorandum of Conversation

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This document consists of 4 pages  
of Series A

DATE: July 12, 1961

SUBJECT: Meeting of the Interdepartmental Coordination Group on Germany and Berlin

PARTICIPANTS: White House: Mr. Acheson  
Gen. Taylor  
Mr. Bundy  
Mr. Kissinger  
Mr. Owen

CIA: [Redacted]  
Mr. Helms  
USIA: Mr. Phillips  
Mr. Brook

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~~COPIES TO:~~ Defense: Mr. Nitze  
Gen. Gray  
Col. Armstrong  
Col. Cannon

State: Mr. Johnson Mr. Topping  
Mr. Achilles Mr. Day  
Mr. Davis Mr. Mautner  
Mr. Hillenbrand Mr. Weiss  
Mr. Cash  
~~MxxxFreshman~~

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The group met to consider the study assembled by the Department of State in response to NSC Directive No. 58. Mr. Johnson inquired whether members of the group had noted any errors either of omission or commission, or had comments to make concerning the study.

Mr. Fowler felt that the statements concerning economic countermeasures appearing on page 3 of the memorandum were inaccurate, and should be altered to reflect the fact that the Treasury document as such was not completely responsive to the Directive. He also noted that the timetable indicated that high level negotiations within NATO concerning a total embargo would be deferred until September. He felt that a decision should be taken now to press for high level negotiations within NATO aimed at getting firm governmental commitments for actions which could be taken at later dates.

Mr. Fowler also commented that the wording of the paper suggested that economic sanctions would be directed against East Germany. He felt that sanctions should also be sought covering the Soviet Bloc rather than Germany alone. He would hope for a firm United States position to the effect that countermeasures would be applied directly against the Soviet Bloc. In discussing these points, Mr. Hillenbrand mentioned the tripartite work which has been going forward with the British and French on economic sanctions, and possible difficulties including undesired leaks, which might arise in taking the matter up prematurely within NATO. He felt that the reservations expressed by the Treasury representatives could be resolved, since the problem seemed mainly one of drafting rather than difference in views.

Mr. Nitze

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Mr. Nitze felt that the document lacked an annex on the crucial point of tripartite and quadripartite negotiations in building solidarity and unity among our Allies. He also felt that there would be material changes in our program caused by variations in targets and powers. He mentioned a possible stretchout in our military buildup, such as the capability of sending two divisions to Europe by January 1, two more by February 1, and two more by March 1. He pointed out the time element involved in the problems of training, logistics, and equipment.

Mr. Johnson asked for clarification on the item in the Directive concerning capability for military action. Some confusion had arisen as to whether it was intended that the United States be capable of such action by October 15, or four months after October 15. Mr. Acheson said that he had intended the schedule to be much more flexible, that it had not been expected that the United States should be capable of the proposed military action by October 15. Rather, that we should be increasingly capable of such action after that date, and that he felt it would be good if we were capable of doing what we wanted by early 1962.

General Taylor pointed out that it was illogical to wait until we were challenged to start our buildup. It appeared preferable to start the buildup in the expectation of the likelihood of a challenge. Mr. Nitze said that the Department of Defense was thinking in terms of a declaration of national emergency about August 1, the call-up of a reserve division about August 15, and continuing increase in our military capabilities thereafter. He pointed out that the STRAC divisions were airborne and that the military planners would probably, therefore, prefer to hold them in reserve and commit regular infantry divisions first. Responding to queries from Mr. Johnson, he and General Gray said that the principal difficulty was that of manpower. Reserve divisions were necessary for the projected buildup, and they could not be called up in the absence of the powers conveyed under a declaration of national emergency.

The group discussed briefly the question whether naval blockade was an act of war. The consensus was that, regardless of legalisms, it would be so regarded by the USSR. Mr. Acheson said that the United States should be ready for ground action when naval action was undertaken, though ground action need not be undertaken simultaneously. He mentioned the inability to predict the result of blockades, and in that connection recounted events following our general freezing order against Japan of July 26, 1941.

There was discussion of the dates of the various phases. Mr. Nitze felt that the idea of phases was sound, but that they should not be tied to specific dates. Rather, they should be planned on a schedule of possible Soviet actions. He suggested that Phase I cover the period until the signing of a peace treaty between the USSR and the GDR; that Phase II cover the subsequent period until the GDR took action to control or impede Western access to Berlin; and that Phase III cover subsequent developments. He pointed out that the timing of the first two Phases was up to the Russians and the East Germans and that that of the III Phase was ours. In that connection, Mr. Johnson pointed out that the September 17 date for Phase I was tied to the time of the elections in West Germany, and that it would be preferable to plan in terms of four phases, the fourth being subsequent to interference with access.

Mr. Johnson

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Mr. Johnson said that the fundamental question before the group was: What should we recommend to our principals to come out of the discussion in the NSC meeting on July 13? He also felt that the group should consider whether the pros and cons of the problem have been sufficiently clearly presented.

Mr. Nitze felt that the two essential first decisions to be taken were those covering a request for additional funds for the military and the declaration of a state of national emergency by the President. He said that the more the Department of Defense examined the problem of building up our strength, the more important the declaration of a national emergency appeared. Our movements after obtaining the authority conferred by such a declaration could be fast or slow, soft or hard, depending upon developments. Mr. Bundy felt that the President might want to have estimates of the effects of a wider group of actions than those covered by the study. Mr. Nitze said that the Department of Defense could have more detailed information along that line available in time for the NSC meeting. He pointed out that Mr. McNamara and others in the Department of Defense were examining that whole question urgently and intensively.

Mr. Acheson felt that the problem of the military buildup had two steps. The first was that of achieving an adequate military level by early 1962; the second that of continuing that level. While we might be able to achieve the level on the basis of a declaration of national emergency, additional legislation would be necessary if it were to be maintained. General Taylor pointed out that an early decision to embark on the buildup was necessary, and that it was possible to leave refinements in the plan for a later date. Mr. Nitze mentioned the difficulty of starting and stopping alterations in our military posture. He said that action in line with the President's Directive was already being taken. This was due partly to uncertainty regarding the situation which the military was expected to achieve by October 15.

Mr. Acheson expressed the view that at the earliest possible moment the President should decide whether a program of the sort contained in this study should be our policy, or whether there would be a "Lippmann-Morgan policy," which he described "as doing it with mirrors." He felt that if the United States were to follow anything like the course covered by the study we would have to approach our Allies almost at once at a very high level. He expressed the view that there would be a revolt in Congress if it was not given strong leadership soon on the Berlin question.

Mr. Acheson felt that the matter had been examined exhaustively over the past several months, and that it would be difficult to prepare additional useful papers at this time. He emphasized that the basic decisions must be taken soon. The collateral decisions, although important, could be firmly agreed upon later. We could refine our information and program, but the basic decisions must be taken with as little delay as possible.

General Taylor agreed that an early decision should be made as to the attitude and determination of our Government; the detailed timetable could be developed later.

Mr. Bundy agreed in general with Mr. Acheson's view. He pointed out, however, that the decision to declare a state of national emergency was a major "quantum jump."

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jump." In his view, and that of the majority of the group, it was incorrect to think in terms of a "limited" national emergency. He thought the President might wish to know what could be done if the target date were later and no national emergency declared shortly. General Gray and Mr. Nitze reiterated that in the absence of a declaration of a national emergency only limited strengthening of our military posture could be accomplished. This was covered in the first 15 points of the military section of the timetable. Further steps would require national emergency. Responding to Mr. Acheson's query whether there were other legal consequences of a declaration of national emergency, Mr. Nitze said that there were some, but that the most important was that affecting manpower. They agreed that it might be possible for Congress to give the Executive the powers involved in a declaration of national emergency while calling it something else.

Mr. Fowler called attention to the fact that, if a national emergency were declared, the Executive should move to obtain certain other powers and controls at the same time. A declaration of national emergency in itself brings some reactions, and the Executive should ask for the simplest and quickest form of authority in order to control them.

Mr. Johnson said that the discussion indicated there were three major public steps to be taken: (1) a request for additional military appropriations; (2) a declaration of national emergency, with related powers, and (3) economic controls. It was felt that the three steps constituted an integrated whole and that one Presidential decision would cover all three. Not much could be done in the absence of a declared national emergency. Mr. Johnson inquired what could be expected if the declaration of a national emergency were delayed. The Defense representatives felt that the minimum required time for anything approaching the recommended level of military posture was four months from the date of decision to declare the emergency.

Mr. Johnson emphasized to the group the highly sensitive nature of the study, and the extremely limited distribution which would be given to it.

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