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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

12

9 June 1961

MEMORANDUM FOR THE UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

SUBJECT: SNIE 2-61: SOVIET AND OTHER REACTIONS TO VARIOUS COURSES OF ACTION REGARDING BERLIN

- 1. The attached draft estimate has been approved by the Board of National Estimates pursuant to a consideration of it by the USIB representatives.
- 2. This estimate has been placed on the agenda of the USIB meeting scheduled for 10:30 Tuesday, 13 June.

*Willard C. Matthias*  
 WILLARD C. MATTHIAS  
 Acting Deputy Assistant Director  
 National Estimates

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

9 June 1961

SUBJECT: SNIE 2-61: SOVIET AND OTHER REACTIONS TO VARIOUS COURSES OF ACTION REGARDING BERLIN

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet and other reactions to four courses of Allied (US, UK, and France) action in the event of an unacceptable degree of Soviet or East German interference with Western access to West Berlin. The courses of action are: (a) a substantial effort to maintain ground access to West Berlin by a limited military action; (b) a substantial effort to maintain air access; (c) other pressures and reprisals against the USSR and East Germany; and (d) large-scale preparations for general war.

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#### SCOPE NOTE

This estimate is a revision of SNIE 100-6-59, dated 6 April 1959.<sup>1/</sup> The courses of action considered in that estimate have been altered and expanded in the present paper.

#### THE ESTIMATE

1. It is now two and one-half years since the USSR projected the Berlin issue into the forefront of East-West contention. During this period the USSR has persisted with great seriousness in its attempts to bring about a change in the status of the city. At the same time, the Soviet leaders probably have come to appreciate more fully a point which they may have underestimated when they first put forth their demands in November 1958: that the US attaches great importance to the Western position in Berlin and will go to considerable lengths to maintain it.<sup>2/</sup>

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<sup>1/</sup> SNIE 100-6-59, "Soviet and Other Reactions to Various Courses of Action in the Berlin Crisis," dated 6 April 1959, TOP SECRET, LIMITED DISTRIBUTION.

<sup>2/</sup> The representative of the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy, reserves his position on this sentence.

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2. During this same period, attitudes in France, the UK, and West Germany have also undergone some change. On the one hand, the sense of vulnerability in these countries has grown with advances in Soviet weaponry and corresponding increases in Soviet confidence and assertiveness. On the other hand, these countries have drawn encouragement from the fact that the Soviets, at least to date, have been unwilling to implement threats which initially seemed to foreshadow immediate encroachments. There has also been time for the Western Powers to explore the Soviet position and to canvass a variety of possible concessions which might accommodate the USSR without jeopardizing the essentials of the Western position. This process has led to a wide measure of agreement that the Soviet purpose is, ultimately, absorption of the city by the GDR rather than some lesser objective.

3. Nevertheless, while much has been clarified, much remains uncertain. In particular, each side finds it difficult to reach a confident judgment of the point at which the other would be willing to run substantial military risks over Berlin. In these circumstances, the USSR will almost certainly continue its efforts to induce the Allies to negotiate their own gradual departure from the city. Throughout these maneuvers, however, the

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Soviet leaders will be continually reassessing the willingness of the three Western Powers to defend their interests with force. In this appraisal, they will consider the official positions and military dispositions of the Allied governments. But they will also have to make judgments about intangibles -- the willingness of each government to disregard or be guided by the advice of its partners; the degree to which each is influenced by domestic public opinion; the readiness of each, in a moment of crisis, to assume risks which may run as high as general nuclear war.

4. In deciding when and how to move against Allied access to Berlin, the Soviet leaders will seek to turn these factors to their own advantage. They will precede any such move with diplomatic measures designed to demonstrate that they are resorting to unilateral action only after all other alternatives have been exhausted. These measures may include another round of negotiations and, almost certainly, a separate peace treaty with the GDR intended to provide both another warning and another occasion for the Allies to reconsider their position.

5. Even after these steps have been accomplished, the USSR and the GDR almost certainly will not explicitly deny access to

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Berlin. Instead, they will simply make Allied access subject to certain new conditions, beginning presumably with the replacement of Soviet by East German controllers in the access procedures. They will almost certainly not attempt at the same time to close off Berlin from West German civilian access, which is already under East German control. Thus the USSR will hope to make it as difficult as possible for the Allied governments to conclude that the new situation is a clear-cut denial of access, to agree among themselves on strong countermeasures, and to justify these to their populations.

6. In spite of such Soviet efforts, however, there has been, according to the terms of our problem, an "unacceptable" degree of interference with Western access to Berlin. It is assumed that the US, UK, and France have therefore agreed in undertaking one or more of the stated courses of action. The subsequent course of the crisis would be heavily influenced by the particular context of events at the time when access was interfered with. Further, the exact nature of tactical moves, and the manner in which they were made, would have important effects on the way in which each side assessed the continuing resolution and intentions of the other. An added difficulty is

that we necessarily treat each course first in isolation, although we recognize that its effect might be greater if it were combined with other actions. We have therefore attempted only to describe the basic factors underlying Soviet and other reactions to these courses, recognizing that these reactions will also be influenced by specific elements of the situation which cannot now be foreseen.

COURSE A: A substantial effort to reopen and maintain ground access by a limited military action -- defined as the utilization of up to two reinforced divisions with tactical air support in readiness if required. The force would proceed on the autobahn toward Berlin. If its movement was opposed, it would attempt to overcome resistance and to secure the road.

7. The Soviets would have considered a reaction on this scale as possible but unlikely; if they had judged it to be probable, they almost certainly would have avoided provoking it. They probably would not conclude from this reaction alone that the Allies had taken a firm decision to press all the way

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to general war if necessary; yet they could not be certain that they would not miscalculate further Western steps as they had the first. They would wish to minimize the risks of general war, and they would be gravely concerned lest large-scale fighting within East Germany create an uncontrollable situation. Yet they would regard their prestige as being heavily engaged, and they would greatly fear that failure to act would undermine Communist authority in East Germany, and perhaps lead to popular uprisings.

8. We believe it virtually certain that the Soviets would not permit Western forces to seize control of the entire autobahn and march unopposed into Berlin. They would probably try first to block the Western forces at or near the zonal border, using forces moved into position as soon as Allied preparations were noted. If this failed, and a substantial penetration occurred, the Soviets would seek at a minimum to halt and neutralize the Western forces and, probably, to force their withdrawal. In general, we think that they would undertake the minimum response necessary to accomplish their objective, recognizing that, the larger the scale of any military engagement, the greater would be the risks of a further expansion of the conflict.

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9. In the first stage, it is probable that the USSR would use East German troops, in order to be consistent with the claim of GDR sovereignty and to postpone a Soviet-Western confrontation until it became clear how far the West intended to go in its initial local action. We believe, however, that the USSR would commit its own troops whenever it became clear that East German forces could not deal with the situation. The Soviets would not use other Satellite troops.

10. Throughout, the Soviets would seek to keep the fighting limited and to bring it quickly to an end, in a manner which would demonstrate that a Western resort to force was bound to fail. At the same time, they would mount an intense campaign in support of a call for immediate negotiations, calculating that this would redound to their credit, generate pressure on the Allies to desist, and perhaps contribute to an end to hostilities. They would probably refrain from molesting West Berlin; we do not believe, however, that they would immediately offer to restore the former conditions of access. Their political and psychological activities would be employed as a supplement to military action rather than a substitute for it.

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As a step subsequent to the above, the commitment  
of West German troops as reinforcements.\*

11. The reinforcement with West German forces would presumably occur only after some fighting had already taken place. Simply because it was a reinforcement, the Soviets would probably give increased weight to the possibility that the West was prepared to go very far and take very great risks in defense of its position in Berlin. The fact that West German forces were used would probably cause the Soviets also to fear that the conflict might transform itself into a liberation campaign, involving East German Army defections and popular risings. The Soviets would therefore probably regard any failure to defeat such a force quickly as highly dangerous to their position in East Germany and in Eastern Europe as a whole.

12. The Soviets might decide to seize the initiative with a general nuclear attack on the West, even though no more than

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\* We do not here estimate whether or not the Federal Republic would agree to this course of action.

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minimal surprise would be possible at this point, but we regard this as highly unlikely. Their most probable response would be an intensification of political pressure and a major military effort, although still nonnuclear, to expel the Western forces. We believe that they would still wish to confine the encounter to East German territory, because of a fear that to retaliate against or invade West Germany could lead rapidly to general war.

COURSE B: A substantial effort to maintain air access -- defined as efforts to continue flights unilaterally following attempts by the USSR and the GDR to alter existing flight procedures. If there were interference which endangered the safety of aircraft in the corridors, Allied combat aircraft would come to their assistance.

13. This contingency is most likely to arise by way of Soviet withdrawal from the Berlin Air Safety Center and Allied refusal to accept an East German substitute. In taking such a step, the USSR would probably have concluded in advance that the West would react initially by continuing flights to Berlin without

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the usual guarantees of safety, and accordingly would have planned its next step.

14. The Soviets and East Germans would probably employ means of interference short of firing upon aircraft. If the Allies felt obliged to employ combat aircraft as escorts, we do not believe that the Soviets would even then actually fire upon planes which remained within the corridor, although the likelihood of their doing so would increase. Actual firing would cause them to appear before the world as the initiator of hostilities, and they would probably prefer to limit themselves to electronic countermeasures (ECM), "buzzing," and other non-violent actions. If Allied aircraft opened fire, however, Bloc aircraft would probably return it.

15. The Soviet and East German capability for electronic countermeasures in the Berlin area and the air corridors is sufficient to limit Western air traffic to that which could be maintained under visual flight conditions. Such limitations would not be serious if ground access to West Berlin remained open for West German civilians and their goods. Even if a complete blockade of ground access were established, ECM alone would not succeed in preventing the movement of essential

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they would probably have the effect of strengthening the Soviet judgment that the Allies were unwilling to risk the direct use of force against any but the most clear-cut challenge to their position in Berlin.

17. The Soviet response would probably be limited largely to propaganda, to diplomatic and legal counteraction, and, in the case of naval controls, to reprisals in the form of detention of Allied shipping in areas of Communist control and closing of certain waters to Allied vessels. The USSR could circumvent controls by recourse to ships of other flags and by overland shipments if it felt obliged to do so. It might use armed escorts for its shipping where feasible.

18. Allied naval measures and economic sanctions, even in combination, would have little effect on the Soviet economy. The repercussions for East Germany of a cutoff of all Western trade would be substantial, although current attempts to reorient GDR trade away from the West will reduce this vulnerability in the future. East Germany would probably respond with harassments of West German traffic to Berlin, but we doubt that the Communists would wish in the first instance to cut off this traffic entirely,

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preferring not to raise this additional issue at a time when Allied access was in contention. The USSR would probably calculate that the Allies could not maintain most of these policies effectively over a long period of time. We do not think, therefore, that these courses of action, undertaken in the absence of other moves, would have a significant effect on the Soviet position regarding access. Taken in conjunction with other measures, they would probably reinforce in the Soviet mind the possibility that the Allies were prepared to run substantial risks over Berlin.

COURSE D: Large-scale preparations for general war -- defined as widespread deployments, preparations to bring the US to full military and civilian readiness, and corresponding official acts such as declaration of a state of emergency, appropriate Congressional resolutions, and consultations within various alliances.

19. We believe that US preparations for general war of this scope and nature probably would not convince the USSR that the US had firmly decided to proceed if necessary to that extreme, but

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the Soviet leaders would certainly view the chances of general war as dangerously increased. Particularly if the principal NATO allies of the US appeared to be in agreement, we think that the Soviets would probably seek ways to reopen negotiations, hoping that they could in the subsequent bargaining achieve some change in the status of Berlin favorable to them. It should be observed, however, that the danger of miscalculation in this situation would be great. If the NATO Allies clearly were not in step with the US, we still think it likely that the Soviets would seek to open negotiations; in this case, however, they would probably expect the divided policies of their opponents to assure a favorable diplomatic outcome for themselves.

At a step subsequent to the above, the issuance of an Ultimatum

20. It is difficult to imagine that the Soviets, the three Western Powers, and the world at large would allow the Berlin situation to come to a point where the US and its allies issued an ultimatum demanding a redress of grievances, say within 24 hours, on pain of general war. But if that situation had in fact been reached, the Soviets would be confronted with a grave

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threat to their security and to their prestige as a great power. It is possible that they would not be fully convinced that the US was in fact resolved to carry through with the ultimatum, and that they would conclude that superficial concessions would bring about a return to negotiations. We think it more likely that, by the time the ultimatum was issued, both sides would have accepted the virtual inevitability of general war.\*

Reactions to the postulated courses in other areas

21. In the NATO countries, much would depend on the manner in which the issue was posed. In general, the postulated courses of action would excite widespread public alarm and dismay in varying degree as they appeared to threaten general war. To be sure, by the terms of our problem the British and French Governments would have agreed in advance to the stated courses of action, and presumably they would have done something to prepare their peoples for the crisis. It goes without saying that the other members of NATO would expect to have been consulted. Yet

\* The representatives of the Director of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, the Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army, the Assistant Chief of Naval Operations (Intelligence), Department of the Navy, and the Director of Intelligence, Joint Staff, reserve their positions on this paragraph.



we believe there would be little public support for the more drastic allied responses unless the earlier Soviet (or East German) action could be convincingly portrayed as an attempt to seize control of Berlin rather than merely to introduce changes in access procedures. Even in this case, many Europeans would balk at taking such risks for the sake of Berlin, and public support from some NATO governments would be reluctantly given.\*

22. In East Germany, there would be a possibility, particularly in connection with Course A, of popular risings, but we think it more likely that the population would not expose itself to retaliation so long as the outcome remained uncertain. The longer the fighting under Course A, the higher the chances of scattered antiregime demonstrations and violence. Both hopes and fears would be aroused among the populations of East Europe, but these would have no great political effect in the short term.

23. In most non-European countries, attention would be focused primarily upon the possibility of general war, and this

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\* The representative of the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, reserves his position on this paragraph.

consideration would probably override views about the rights and wrongs of the access issue. Few countries would cooperate in multilateral indirect reprisals of the type envisaged in Course C. It is almost certain that the situation would be brought to the UN, and that many countries would exert pressure on both the US and the USSR to resume negotiations and ease the crisis.\*

General Considerations

24. It is important to emphasize again that the courses of action postulated in this estimate have been considered mainly in isolation from each other and from other events, and that such a treatment is to a large degree artificial. Just as the initial Soviet action would have been based on an assessment of numerous indications, tangible and intangible, of probable Western responses, so the Soviet reaction in the second round would be based on a similarly broad assessment of the West's next step, drawn from the entire range of political and military activity. Central to this assessment would be the Soviet leaders' impression of the will and determination of Western leadership to persist in a firm course, and the ability of that leadership to carry the

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\* The representative of the Director for Intelligence, Joint Staff, reserves his position on this paragraph.

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Western peoples with them. The Soviet judgment would be taken in a context of severe international crisis, with many countries making their weight felt in diplomatic exchanges and, probably, in UN debate. As tensions rose, worldwide demands that the parties to the dispute take no precipitate action and return to negotiation would grow in intensity, to such a degree that both sides might feel obliged to weigh seriously the reactions of world opinion to any further steps.

25. The Soviets would probably consider that the consequences of forcing their policy on Berlin under conditions of intense and possibly prolonged crisis could be damaging to the further perspectives of their policy. They might hesitate to persist in their demands if they believed that the result would be greatly heightened tensions and an atmosphere of such hostility that nothing could be negotiated for a long time to come. On the other hand, they would also consider the damage to Western confidence and unity, and the advantages to their own cause, that would result from a clear victory on Berlin.

26. We are confident that the Soviet leaders do not intend to wage general war in order to change the status of Berlin. At

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the same time, however, the Soviet leaders are almost certainly confident that neither the US nor its major allies will go to general war in order to prevent a change in that status. We doubt that they can be fully convinced to the contrary, but we believe that one or more of the postulated courses of action, taken together with supporting political and diplomatic action by the US and its allies, might reduce the Soviet leaders' confidence in this judgment and persuade them that the West was willing to take actions of such high risk that the situation would soon get out of control. Thus the Soviets might be prepared to believe that the crisis could eventuate in general war even though neither side originally had intended to go that far. They certainly desire to avoid such uncontrollable situations, but it is impossible to estimate at just what point they might be willing to modify their Berlin policy in order to retrieve the situation, or whether they would consider that the stakes were already so high that they could not afford to compromise.

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