

SNE 100-2-59
24 February 1959

~~SECRET~~

SPECIAL
NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE ESTIMATE
NUMBER 100-2-59

PROBABLE SOVIET COURSES OF ACTION
REGARDING BERLIN AND GERMANY

ACCOUNTABLE DOCUMENT
RETURN TO OADR REGISTRY
Box 7E-474

Submitted by the

DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

All intelligence organizations participated in the preparation of this estimate. The Central Intelligence Agency and the intelligence organizations of the Department of the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Joint Staff.

Concurred in by the

UNITED STATES INTELLIGENCE BOARD

on 24 February 1959. Concurring were 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 for Intelligence, Department of the Navy; the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF; the Director for Intelligence, The Joint Staff; the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense, Special Operations; and the Director of the National Security Agency. The Atomic Energy Commission Representative to the USIB and the Assistant Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, abstained, the subject being outside of their jurisdiction.

~~SECRET~~

This document has been approved for release through the HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM of the Central Intelligence Agency.

~~SECRET~~

Date 7/9/93
HRP 93-3

PROBABLE SOVIET COURSES OF ACTION REGARDING BERLIN AND GERMANY¹

THE PROBLEM

To estimate Soviet objectives and tactics with respect to negotiation over Berlin and Germany, the likelihood of Soviet turnover of access controls to the East German regime, and Bloc reactions to certain Western responses to this action.

THE ESTIMATE

I. SOVIET OBJECTIVES AND TACTICS IN NEGOTIATION

1. We continue to believe that Moscow has raised the Berlin issue at this time because of a variety of related factors, some bearing on the consolidation of the Communist position in Eastern Europe, others on weakening the Western Alliance. Specifically, we believe that Soviet objectives include the reduction and eventual elimination of the disruptive influence which West Berlin and the presence there of Western troops exerts on the East German regime (GDR), the raising of the internal and international prestige of that regime, the fostering of discord among the NATO Allies, the limitation of West German armament and the prevention of a West German nuclear capability, an early summit meeting, and the eventual neutralization of West Germany as an effective member of the Western Alliance. Whatever may be the or-

der of priority among these objectives, it is clear that the Soviet leaders have now committed themselves on the issue of Berlin in an unprecedented manner.

2. As their repeated statements imply, the Soviet leaders probably have a genuine interest in negotiating with the West on the subject of Berlin, and indeed on the broader German problem. Their attitude reflects the high confidence they have in their bargaining position. While the Soviets wish to avoid general war, they almost certainly consider Soviet advances in nuclear capabilities as having brought about such an improvement in Soviet military strength that the West will hesitate increasingly before taking any action involving substantial risk of general war. The Soviets probably also hope that they can play upon differences of view among the Western Powers as to the extent of the risk that should be assumed in regard to Berlin. To pose a choice between actions risking war and actions tending to erode the Western position in Berlin must therefore be likely, in Soviet eyes, to make it more difficult for the Western Allies to maintain a united front.

¹This estimate was prepared in response to a series of questions posed by the Department of State and therefore represents a specialized supplement to SNIIE 100-13-58, "Soviet Objectives in the Berlin Crisis," 23 December 1958.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

2

3. Furthermore, the Soviet leaders almost certainly view the Western position in Berlin itself as overextended. They see West Berlin as a remote enclave within Bloc territory, the supply of whose civilian population is already subject to East German controls, and they view the Western garrisons as token forces whose right of land access is not specifically defined in any legal or political instrument. The Soviets probably believe that the facts of the access situation are such that, in the event of a turnover, the Allies would be obliged to acquiesce, to resort to a garrison airlift, or to initiate the use of force.

4. While we believe, as stated above, that the Soviets have high confidence in the bargaining position and their military posture in the Berlin situation, we also believe that the Soviets wish to avoid serious risk of general war. Hence, they will consider their military strength primarily as a factor increasing the likelihood of their obtaining advantages by political means, i.e., by negotiation. The Soviets will, in our opinion, continue to take an intransigent position and to believe that they can achieve important gains without making significant concessions. Nevertheless, we believe that they would prefer to avoid an actual confrontation of forces over the issue of access to Berlin lest events get out of control. On the other hand, they view the risk involved in confrontation as at least equally alarming to the Western side, and they will, until late in the game, play upon this risk, and the Western fear of it, as a principal counter in their maneuvering.

5. The Soviets probably also feel that in a negotiated settlement they could reduce some of the disadvantages to the Bloc which are inherent in the present situation. Any agreement which prejudiced the Western position in West Berlin and which tended to confirm the division of Germany and Europe would discourage the forces of discontent in the GDR and elsewhere in Eastern Europe and impart greater stability to the Satellite regimes. Quite apart from the substance of any agreement that might be reached, the mere participation of the East Germans in

any negotiations would enhance the status of the Pankow regime. An agreement which forbade nuclear arms to West Germany would lessen the Soviet fear of the impact of a resurgent Germany, particularly on the Soviet position in Eastern Europe.

6. Finally it is possible, though on the whole we do not believe it likely, that the Soviet initiative on the Berlin issue reflects a desire to explore the possibilities of changing the situation in Central Europe on the basis of concessions on both sides. The Soviets have not offered concessions from their previous positions on Eastern Europe, German reunification or Berlin and prior to negotiations they would not be likely to indicate what concessions they might make. Their tactics in any negotiations on such a broad scale would vary according to the moves and reactions of the West.

7. In negotiating on Berlin, the Soviets would press for acceptance of their "free city" proposal and might introduce modifications in this scheme in the hope of securing Western acceptance for it. The minimum terms on which the Kremlin would be willing to call off the planned transfer of access controls to the GDR would probably be the establishment of official dealings between the GDR and the West, together with restrictions on propaganda and intelligence activities in West Berlin, and the flow of refugees through that city. The Soviets would estimate that any modification in Berlin's status and any other arrangements tending to imply Western recognition of the GDR would provide a precedent for further attacks upon the Western position in Berlin and a vital step toward achieving their larger objectives in Germany.

8. In negotiations on the broader German problem, the proposal for a peace treaty with a divided Germany would form the core of the Soviet position. In addition, the Soviets might propose that the Four Powers endorse direct negotiations between the "two Germanies" on the Communist-"confederation" plan. While Moscow probably would not expect to gain Western acceptance of these pro-

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

3

posals, they would hope in negotiations to push the West in this direction with the particular view of extracting some concessions which would enhance the international standing of the GDR. Moreover, they would probably hope to engage the West in serious negotiations on certain features of the peace treaty proposal, in particular the establishment of a nuclear-free zone and the limitation of forces in Germany. But whatever their proposals, the Soviets would almost certainly continue to adhere to certain key positions. They would seek the substance of the conditions regarding Berlin mentioned above. In addition, the Soviets would almost certainly maintain their long-standing position that the problem of German reunification can only be solved by the "two Germanies," that this problem cannot be negotiated by the four former occupying powers, and that, at most, Four Power talks should seek to facilitate negotiations between the "two Germanies." They would insist that free elections on the territory of the GDR were not an acceptable means of achieving a unified German state and that a reunited Germany would not be free to join NATO.

9. While the Soviets have formally rejected the linking of Berlin and Germany with discussions of European security, they would probably enter such a negotiation, provided they were given parity of representation. They would be prepared to discuss disengagement and arms limitation, particularly in the nuclear and missile fields. To the extent that such discussion touched on Berlin and Germany, they would probably insist on the substance of the conditions mentioned in the foregoing paragraphs, and on the participation of the "two Germanies" in some appropriate form.

10. Whatever the scope of the negotiations which the Western Powers were willing to entertain, it is likely that the Soviets would at some stage attempt to make their proposals more attractive by modifying some of the positions they have heretofore taken. For example, they might offer to place a "free

city" of West Berlin under UN administration. They might agree to UN guarantee of the access routes. It is within the realm of possibility that they might agree to the inclusion of East Berlin in the "free city" arrangement in some fashion, but we believe this to be extremely unlikely.

11. There will hang over all negotiations the threat that control of the access to West Berlin will be handed over to the East Germans if some agreement satisfactory to Moscow is not reached. We do not believe that a turnover will be undertaken prior to 27 May, or that it would take place at a later date if negotiations were under way or impending, unless the Soviets came to believe that progress through negotiation was not possible. The Kremlin probably conceives of itself as able to confront the Western Powers with an unpleasant but inescapable alternative, either to agree to or acquiesce in changes in the present situation which would lead to an erosion of the Western position in Berlin and West Germany, or to face substantial risk of war in order to maintain what would appear to the public at large as minor procedural arrangements at the frontiers.

II. THE QUESTION OF TURNOVER

12. The question arises of whether, if talks fail to materialize or veer toward a stalemate or collapse, there exist any means by which the Western Powers could deter the Soviet Union from turning over access controls, or persuade it to make the turnover in form but not in fact. It is our view that if negotiations failed to produce results acceptable to the USSR, only a conviction that the West intended to use force would cause the Soviets to reconsider turning over access controls to the East Germans. A principal factor would be the Soviet assessment of Western, particularly US, intentions. The Soviets might believe that the West would use force to probe their intentions, but be uncertain as to how far the West would go in the use of force. Or they might believe that the West would use whatever force proved necessary, even if such use of force led to general war.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

4

13. In the event that the Soviets were convinced that the West intended to use force to probe Soviet intentions, but were uncertain as to how far the West would go in the use of force, we believe that the odds are about even that the USSR would not turn over to the GDR complete control of land, water, and air access to Berlin. On the one hand, they would fear that local clashes would lead to such an involvement of prestige and emotions that the situation could get out of control and result in grave risk of general war. On the other hand, they would realize that they had local military superiority. They would doubt that Western leaders would press the use of force to the point of seriously risking general war. Moreover, it would be difficult to convince Moscow that the Allied governments were united in their determination to use any force, or that they had the support of Western public opinion.

14. The USSR would almost certainly back away from a full turnover of access controls if it were convinced that the Western Powers were determined to use whatever degree of force was necessary to maintain access to Berlin free of GDR controls, even if such use of force led to general war. But it would be most difficult to convince the Soviet leadership that this was so. In the absence of manifest preparations for war on an extended scale they would doubt the intent of Western leaders to take such risks. Even in the face of specific warnings and military preparations the Soviets would probably remain skeptical of the ability of Western leaders to obtain public support for resort to general war, particularly if the Soviets could make the issue appear to be merely one of whether Soviet or East German authorities were to check Allied credentials at the access points.

15. If they decided to avoid a showdown over the question of access controls, the Soviet leaders would still seek to avoid the appearance of retreat. They might withdraw their garrisons and officials from East Berlin amid great fanfare without relinquishing their responsibilities over the access routes to West Berlin. Or, while making formal announce-

ment of the turnover, they might in fact retain Soviet personnel at the check points to deal with Western military movements.

16. If the Soviets turned over all access controls, they would probably seek to head off an abrupt Western reaction by prior assurance that free access to West Berlin would be maintained by the GDR and might intimate that the East Germans would not interfere with Allied military movements despite the refusal of convoy commanders to show their credentials.

III. SOVIET REACTIONS TO VARIOUS WESTERN COURSES OF ACTION

Western Acquiescence

17. Should the Allies elect to acquiesce in the turnover of controls, the East Germans initially would probably be correct and unprovocative in the operation of the checkpoints. This would be true whether or not the West asserted the "agent" theory of continuing Soviet responsibility for free access.

18. However, once the Western Powers were firmly committed to dealing with the East Germans on the access issue, Bloc authorities would make political capital of that fact. Particularly for the benefit of the West Germans, they would stress the contention that Western acquiescence constituted *de facto* recognition of the East German regime and acceptance of the "two Germanies" concept. Sooner or later, perhaps in connection with the tenth anniversary of the GDR in October 1959, propaganda pressures would probably be augmented by harassing moves aimed at inducing the withdrawal of Western garrisons, expanding the area of dealings with the GDR, and at persuading the West Berliners that their safety and livelihood depended on reaching an understanding with the GDR. Such harassment might be minor at first, but in due course the Western Powers would be forced to choose between accepting the progressive erosion of their position in Berlin or taking a strong stand on the basis of a legal position weaker than it is now.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

5

A Garrison Airlift

19. Should the Western Powers decide, after the turnover had taken place, to supply their small garrisons entirely by air, Soviet and East German authorities would probably not initially interfere with force. Given the small tonnages involved, a garrison airlift could almost certainly be carried out by visual flight methods and the Communists would be unable to effectively hamper Western military air traffic by jamming controls and communications. Extensive physical harassment of such an airlift in its early stages probably would be considered politically inadvisable, and the Communists would instead concentrate on making the Western Powers appear ridiculous for using an expensive airlift merely to avoid dealing with GDR officials. The Communists would sooner or later probably commence direct physical harassment of the garrison airlift. Such harassment might include flying their own aircraft in the corridors, firing antiaircraft weapons in the corridors, attempting to force down aircraft alleged to be engaged in intelligence activities, and the like.

20. It is also likely that the Soviets would formally withdraw the guarantee of safety of Western civilian flights through the air corridors to Berlin. They would justify this act on the ground that sovereignty over these corridors resided in the GDR. In its turn Pankow could refuse to assume responsibility for the safety of these flights unless the Western Powers accepted an East German representative in the Berlin Air Safety Center. Without adequate guarantees the Western airlines would probably refuse to fly to Berlin and if the air connection to Berlin, including the evacuation of refugees, were to be maintained, Western military aviation would have to assume this responsibility.

21. If these pressures failed to induce the West to negotiate on Berlin, the Soviets would probably undertake some harassment of civilian surface access from the West to West Berlin. By such means as raising tolls and introducing arbitrary procedures they could make it difficult for the West Berlin economy

to function. They would probably expect that such low key tactics would in time produce growing pressure in West Berlin and West Germany for an accommodation. They would probably not initially impose a total blockade for fear of the impact on world public opinion.

Economic Sanctions

22. An embargo of all trade between the NATO Powers and the GDR would create an important dislocation both of the East German economy and of East German-Bloc trade. The total commodity trade between the GDR and the NATO countries is on the order of \$580 million a year, about two-thirds of which is between West Germany and the GDR. This trade is about 17 percent of the GDR's total commodity trade. This dislocation would be greater if the NATO countries refused to charter ships to the Bloc and if the use of water routes through West Germany to East Germany were denied. Initially, the application of sanctions would lead either to a considerable increase in unemployment in East Germany and a general failure of the GDR to meet its export commitments to the Bloc, or to a Soviet crash aid program in behalf of the GDR together with some local disorganization of Bloc production and trade.

23. Economic sanctions to be effective would have to be applied by the NATO countries principally involved, particularly West Germany. Sanctions would be considerably weakened if other free world countries filled the gap or if free world trade with the GDR were rerouted through other Bloc countries. It is doubtful that unity of action among all the countries concerned could be achieved. As indicated, economic sanctions would injure the GDR and the Bloc. We do not believe, however, that the threat of such sanctions alone would prevent the Soviets from proceeding with turnover, or that their imposition after turnover would cause the Soviets to reverse themselves. They could be an important factor if associated with other means of pressure.

~~SECRET~~

~~SECRET~~

6

The Use of Force to Maintain Access²

24. If, after the Soviets had turned over access controls, they were actually confronted with a Western effort to maintain road access to Berlin by force, Soviet and East German authorities would almost certainly feel compelled to react vigorously. The nature of the reaction would doubtless depend, to some degree, on the way the situation had developed by the time the issue was faced. As a general proposition, however, we believe that if confronted with a convoy escorted by a token force, the Soviets, probably through the use of East Germans, would almost certainly try to bar its passage by means short of active combat, i.e., by road obstructions, demolitions, a show of force, etc. If, however, these means

²The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, believes that the reasoning presented in paragraphs 24, 25, and 26 is valid only insofar as the Soviets are convinced that the actions they take will not gravely risk general war. He further believes that the Soviets will estimate that any active combat between Western and Soviet or GDR forces will gravely risk general war; and, therefore, they will not permit the situation to develop to the point where active armed combat occurs.

In support of this, he cites the following from NIE 11-4-58, "Main Trends in Soviet Capabilities and Policies, 1958-1963," "... we believe that the Soviets would seek to prevent any crisis from developing in such a way as to leave themselves only a choice between accepting a serious reverse and taking action which would substantially increase the likelihood of general war." (Paragraph 105, page 29)

In order to establish the perspective of the above, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, USAF, would introduce paragraphs 24, 25, and 26 with a lead-in paragraph substantially as follows:

"As we have said in paragraphs 12-14 above, the Soviets would be skeptical of Western intentions to use force or of Western ability to obtain public support for a resort to general war. However, we believe that the Soviets, realizing the risk of general war, would be extremely unlikely to allow the situation to develop where active combat between Western and Soviet or GDR forces was on the verge of becoming an actuality. Rather we believe that they would almost certainly accept a reverse before they would run the grave risk which could result from actual armed engagement. Paragraphs 24, 25, and 26 below discuss the situation under which the Soviets have decided to accept this grave risk."

were not successful we believe they would resort to active combat. It is conceivable, however, that Bloc authorities would allow one or more such convoys to get through while an effort was made to convoke a high level conference.

25. If a heavily armed and sizable task force had entered the GDR, the East Germans and Soviets would probably first demand the immediate withdrawal of the force and a peaceful settlement. But if this demand were not complied with, we believe the Soviets would commit the forces they considered necessary to defeat and drive out the Allied units in a minimum of time. The Communist leaders would probably believe it imperative to demonstrate effectively the inviolability of Bloc territory because of the danger that even limited and temporary Western success on East German soil might lead to defections among GDR troops, or to widespread civil disturbances in the GDR and elsewhere in Eastern Europe, not to mention the blow dealt by such successes to Soviet prestige throughout the world. The Soviet leaders would thus have strong incentives to defeat the Western effort and they undoubtedly would possess high confidence that they could do so with locally available Soviet forces. They would recognize that engagement of a Western task force would involve substantial risk of widened hostilities, but they would probably not have allowed the situation to get to this point if they had been convinced that it would result in general war.

26. Throughout any military crisis over ground access to Berlin, particularly if a confrontation of forces was imminent or had occurred, the USSR would almost certainly conduct an energetic diplomatic and propaganda offensive designed to limit the area and character of the conflict and to bring about a negotiated settlement. If it could not achieve a settlement, the USSR might end the crisis in a manner involving some loss of face on its part, lest matters get out of hand, but the greater likelihood is that it would take all necessary action to force the withdrawal of any Western forces which had entered the GDR. In these circumstances, there would be great danger of an expansion of the conflict.

~~SECRET~~