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Steering Group Meeting, August 17, 1961

Present: The President; the Secretary of State and Mr. Kohler; the Secretary of Defense, Mr. Gilpatric, and General Lemmitzer; the Attorney General; Mr. Dulles and Mr. Murphy; Mr. Wilson; General Taylor, Mr. Bundy, and Mr. Owen.

1. The Secretary of State proposed two actions:
 - a. Reinforcement of the West Berlin garrison.
 - b. A statement of protest by the three Western heads of government.

2. The President decided that the US reinforcement should be one battle group (1500-1800 men). Mr. Kohler reported that the UK had indicated, when reinforcement was discussed in the Ambassadorial Group, that it would probably rest on the modest reinforcement it was already effecting. The French had no instructions. The President said that the allied total should be at least 2500.

3. The President asked about our going to the UN. The Secretary said that there would not be sufficient Afro-Asian support to make a good showing. This might encourage Khrushchev. The UN should be held in reserve for a more important and suitable occasion.

4. The President said that this Bloc move should have been foreseen and that Berlin planning should look ahead to such possible contingencies in the future.

5. The President asked about the timing of the reinforcement and of the tripartite heads of government statement.
 - a. It was agreed that the reinforcement would take place Saturday morning unless a strongly adverse allied reaction developed in the meantime.

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b. The tripartite statement would also be made Saturday.

6. Secretary MacNamara suggested that (i) this Bloc action might portend a speed-up of Khrushchev's schedule; (ii) our own military preparations should be hastened accordingly. There was some disagreement with his diagnosis, but none with his prescription. DOD proposed to move the deadline by which we would be able to put forces in Europe from January 1 to November 15, and to modify preparatory actions accordingly. Secretary MacNamara indicated that this speed-up would result in some imbalance and additional cost. The air units and Army specialist units would be called up earlier than now planned. Demothballing of ships would also be hastened. The Guard divisions would not be called up.

7. Secretary MacNamara said that the US would not replace the battle group that would be withdrawn from the 8th Division to go to Berlin. He was considering instead some large scale movements to Europe, e.g., moving the stocks for two divisions there. He did not want a decision on this now.

8. The President stressed the need to be ready to frustrate any Bloc action looking to rapid "civilian" seizure of key points in West Berlin. It was suggested that the Communists in East Berlin might become "dizzy with success" and act rashly.

9. The President then directed that the proposed heads of government statement be revised, which was done on the spot. It was agreed that the proposed reinforcement would be announced separately.

10. It was agreed that the Vice President and General Clay would leave Friday evening for Bonn and Berlin, where they would deliver the President's answer to Mayor Brandt's letter. Neither this answer nor Mayor Brandt's letter would be made public. It was agreed that the troop reinforcement
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-3-

might be credited to Mayor Brandt's request, however.

11. No single announcement of the accelerated US build-up would be made. The steps would be announced seriatim, as they were taken. Our allies would make similar statements of any accelerated build-up on their part. The US speed-up would not be credited to the access closing.

12. The President asked about the NATO military build-up. Secretary MacNamara said that DOD would submit a memo Friday on this subject.

13. The Attorney General asked if more could not be done to stimulate worldwide protest over the East German action. A group will examine this question and report next week. It will include Mr. Dulles, General Taylor, the Attorney General, Mr. Wilson, and Secretary Goldberg.

14. Mr. Dulles reported a call by General Eisenhower about Berlin. A State-DOD briefing team will be sent, with Mr. Dulles, to Gettysburg Sunday, and Mr. Dulles will notify the General.

15. The President stressed the need for balance, in any press backgrounders, regarding recent events in Berlin. We should make clear that we remained firm in defense of our rights in West Berlin, which had not been affected or threatened by those events.

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