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Berlin Autobahn 5721
Randy 20

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

17 October 1963

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: Berlin Access and Soviet Intentions*

Immediate Soviet Objectives

1. The precise origins of last week's incidents remain obscure, but we believe that Convoy 27's difficulties probably did not arise from a pre-timed Soviet attempt to pose a serious new challenge to Allied access to Berlin. Once the issue was joined, however, the Soviets proved willing to carry it to considerable lengths. The level at which Soviet tactics were determined at various stages remains unclear for the present, but it is almost certain that Moscow itself became involved in the decision to detain Convoy 27 the second time at Babelsberg.

2. Whatever the precise explanation of this episode, however, the subsequent detention of a British convoy and recent statements of local Soviet military authorities indicate that the USSR does

* This memorandum has been prepared by representatives of CIA, DIA, and State/INR.

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not intend to let the issue die. It means to capitalize upon the opportunities inherent in autobahn procedures, demonstrated anew in the dismount squabbles, to resume its pressures upon the Allied position that access to Berlin is, in principle, an untrammelled right.

3. The Soviets have several options for their next moves. They may plug away, via harassments, at enforcing a criterion of their own for dismounting, hoping that the Allies will adjust their convoys in ways which avoid a clear test case and thereby permit the USSR to claim de facto acceptance of its rules. They may seek discussion of access modalities, intending thereby to undermine the occupation concept on which the Allies base their rights. In the light of Ambassador Kohler's proposal to Zorin along this line, they probably now believe that talks of this sort can be arranged, but we cannot exclude that they will seek to underline the point with further autobahn difficulties; indeed, the holdup of the British convoy seems designed to establish a clear Soviet position toward all the Allies. Finally, we believe that the Soviets will try to use the procedural questions raised in these incidents to initiate a new round of diplomatic talks on larger questions such as the status of Berlin.

Relation to General Soviet Policy

4. How does this course of action on the autobahn relate to the broader framework of Soviet foreign policy? Have the Soviets concluded that tactics of detente no longer serve their purposes and should give way to a harsher general line?

5. In analyzing the phase of Soviet policy set in motion by the test ban, we have noted that Soviet objectives concerning Berlin remained unchanged but that the USSR probably saw little promise in an early resumption of serious pressures. We concluded that the USSR looked upon an atmosphere of relaxed tensions as providing, inter alia, opportunities for moving toward these objectives in other ways. From subsequent talks with the US, however, the Soviets have probably concluded that the Western side is interpreting detente to mean that the Berlin question has lost all urgency and that the USSR will content itself with the status quo indefinitely. The autobahn incidents are thus designed to correct this interpretation and at the same time to demonstrate to the West that the USSR is not so weak, nor so bent upon agreements at any price, that it fears to disrupt the atmospherics of amiability.

6. We do not believe, however, that the decision reflected in the challenge to the British convoy heralds a comprehensive

shift in the tactics of Soviet foreign policy. The relaxation of tensions initiated by the USSR last summer stems in large part from economic exigencies and the pressures of the Sino-Soviet dispute, and in neither of these areas do we detect an easing of Soviet problems or any recent change in the manner of meeting them. The Soviets wish to move Berlin to the forefront of issues which must be negotiated in the course of the detente process, and probably now feel that incidents are necessary to promote this objective. They hope that this can be done without damage to their other prospects, and they may believe that the US is by now sufficiently interested in the new atmosphere, and committed to maintaining it, that it will accept an interpretation of detente which involves a new round of negotiations on Berlin. We note, however, that the Soviets do not always calculate foreign reactions accurately in the delicate area between reminders and provocations. !

Possible Internal Complications

7. While the USSR's recent moves can be readily related to long-standing objectives and familiar tactics, their severity and timing nevertheless seem out of harmony with the present course of Soviet policy as a whole. In particular, the incidents seem singularly ill-timed with respect to prospective purchases of US

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wheat. This, plus the circumstances suggesting that Convoy 27's initial difficulties may not have been carefully devised to open a major scenario, raise the possibility of some disagreement within the Soviet hierarchy.

8. There is considerable evidence of policy contention within the Soviet regime last winter and spring, covering a wide range of issues. This evidence leads us to believe that the decision to embark on a period of relaxed tensions was a difficult one to reach and was accepted in varying degrees by different elements of the Soviet leadership. Tactics which blur the concept of full hostility toward the West are usually disquieting to many Soviet politicians. One source of disunity must be military displeasure over signs that Khrushchev intends to use detente as a justification for raising civil priorities at the expense of defense. We have no evidence, however, which would enable us to judge how important diverging interests of this kind might be in the Berlin question, or even whether they figure at all in current Soviet behavior.

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