



The Communist World

SOVIET MOTIVES IN CHALLENGING ALLIED BERLIN ACCESS

The detention for more than 41 hours of a US Berlin-bound convoy at Marienborn on 4 and 5 November is a further indication that Moscow intends to continue harassment of selected convoys in order to overcome Allied unwillingness to engage in a new round of diplomatic negotiations on broader questions related to the status of West Berlin.

Khrushchev himself, in discussing the incident with a group of visiting US businessmen on 6 November, attempted to confuse the whole issue by claiming that Soviet authorities lifted the blockade of the convoy only after the US agreed to obey Soviet control procedures. Khrushchev

added that if US convoys refuse to observe these procedures in the future, they will be stopped. He probably hoped by this latter remark to generate increased concern in the West that future incidents on the autobahn might lead to a dangerous military confrontation.

TASS and Moscow Radio both claim that the incident was the result of a "deliberate provocation," citing Western press statements that the movement of the convoy was intended to "test the intentions" of the Russians. The Soviets apparently had expected such a test after being informed by the three Western

Approved for Release
Date NOV 1994

14

powers on 29 October of their "harmonized procedures" for Berlin convoys.

The Soviet checkpoint commander met the 4 November convoy--the first of nondismountable size since 29 October--with a clear-cut challenge. He bluntly claimed that Soviet, not Allied, authorities determine procedures on the autobahn, that there was no misunderstanding, and that the delay was caused only by US failure to comply with Soviet regulations. His initial position was the same as that taken by Soviet authorities last month in the detention of a British convoy at Babelsberg outside Berlin. At that time, the Soviets demanded that personnel should dismount for a headcount (1) if a convoy consists of five or more vehicles, irrespective of the total number of passengers, or (2) if any one vehicle contains four or more passengers in the rear of the truck.

While there have been discrepancies among the figures cited by Soviet officials regarding the size of the convoys that are dismountable, responsible Soviet Foreign Ministry officials have used the formula "more than five" vehicles in talks with US representatives. In his talk with Secretary Rusk

on 4 November, Soviet Chargé Kornienko contended that there had been an "agreement" that troops will dismount from convoys of "more than five" vehicles. During last month's incident, Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Zorin took the same line with Ambassador Kohler.

Moscow's tactics are aimed at maintaining an impasse over access by opposing the West's harmonized procedures with its alleged "agreed understanding." Soviet leaders probably feel confident that the 4 November incident, together with the prospect of future incidents along the autobahn, will dramatize the urgency of political negotiations to remove a source of tension. They appear to be leaning heavily on assurances given by Ambassador Kohler and Lord Home last month that the US and Britain would be prepared to discuss the obvious disagreement on procedures if the existing tensions could be removed.

The USSR's desire to avoid the risk of even a limited military confrontation was reflected in the release of the US convoy and the failure to hold up the British and French convoys--also of nondismountable size--which were dispatched during the same period the US trucks were being blocked. The

[REDACTED]

The Communist World

Russians are known to have acquired details of Allied plans for responding to interference with convoys, and probably believed that action to put these into effect was already under way on 5 November. There were no indications of any unusual measures being taken by the Soviet forces in East Germany or East German army units, ex-

cept for the deployment of Soviet personnel and vehicles in the immediate area of Marienborn. When the US convoy finally arrived at the Babelsberg checkpoint, there were indications that the processing was being closely supervised and monitored by high-level officials of Soviet headquarters.

[REDACTED]

