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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Office of Current Intelligence  
17 October 1962

CURRENT INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: The Soviets and the Berlin Wall

1. There is considerable evidence that the USSR, backed by the Warsaw Pact, was prepared to react with force in the event that the Allies sought to bloc erection of the Berlin Wall or to destroy the barrier once it had been raised in August 1961.

2. We note that East German boss Ulbricht, when the ever mounting refugee flow reached 29,000 in July alone, flew to Moscow on 1 August to seek relief. There is some suggestion that Moscow demanded decisive action on the part of the Ulbricht regime. Khrushchev reportedly boasted to former West German Ambassador Kroll that he overrode Ulbricht's reluctance to use force against the refugees by telling him that the USSR had the military power to build the Wall and would do so! Two days later the Warsaw Pact's political leaders approved "all necessary measures," and on 10 August Marshal Ivan Konev was recalled from retirement and appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany.

3. The USSR acted rapidly and decisively. Because of its commitment to Ulbricht and the arguments which probably had been required to convince the other Warsaw Pact states of the need for action, it is unlikely that Moscow was in a mood or position to back off.

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4. Although the physical means used to seal off East Berlin on the night of 12/13 August suggest that there had been relatively little time for advance planning, the way in which the operation was mounted indicates that there had been a thorough and realistic assessment of the risks as well as a remarkably efficient job of re-routing interurban transport and other facilities and marshalling supplies, equipment and workers involved in the actual construction. There have been unconfirmed reports that rolls of barbed wire and tank traps made of cut-up railroad tracks were stockpiled in suburban railroad yards earlier that same week. This material was hauled to the sector border on the night of 12/13 August, as were truckloads of workers' militia from outlying cities. These militiamen, little more than party thugs, were used to patrol the sector border within Berlin for several days. In effect, they were the "wall" in its initial stages.

5. The militia may not have had ammunition. But there is little doubt that regular East German army and security troops used at the time at least carried ammunition clips in their pockets. An East German army defector reported in September 1961 that on 13 August his unit had been ordered by the Ministry of Defense to load all of its ammunition on supply trucks and be prepared to move by 20 August. The former commanding officer of the 2nd Battalion of the 1st Motorized Rifle Division, Stahnsdorf, a recent defector, claims that his unit was alerted to move to Berlin if the Allies sought to breach the Wall. A Security Alert Police defector, who fled to West Berlin on 7 September 1961, reported that his unit had been issued firing orders for duty along the sector border.

6. A number of other defectors from the Security Alert Police have confirmed that their units were supplied with ammunition, adding that personnel were instructed not to carry loaded weapons on routine patrol. Security forces were admonished not to fire at escaping refugees who reached West Berlin, at West Berlin Police, or at Allied personnel and probably would not have opposed an Allied incursion. Rather, they would have retreated and left the field to regular East German troops, or--more likely--to Soviet forces, as they did at the Friedrichstrasse crossing point in October 1961.

7. A number of Soviet and East German units began to deploy around Berlin at 0400 on 13 August. At least one motorized rifle regiment and the tank regiment of the East German Army's 1st Motorized Rifle Division moved into East Berlin from their home station at Potsdam. Soviet units from the GSFG's Twentieth Guards Tank and 6th Motorized Rifle Divisions set up roadblocks and checkpoints on a perimeter 2-3 miles outside Berlin and encircling the city. The control points consisted of several tanks and armored personnel carriers and a small number of troops. These Soviet troops remained on the Berlin ring, at no time becoming directly involved, until 16 August, when they returned to their home stations. East German units from the northern part of the GDR which moved into the Berlin area included elements of Military District V, Neubrandenburg, and the 9th Tank Division which moved from Eggesin to Oranienburg. These units did not revert to normal training operations until 11 September.

8. Thus we conclude that the Soviet and East German leaders were prepared to use force defensively if challenged on territory under their control. They probably recognized that they were taking a higher risk than previously in the Berlin context, but they estimated that this was an acceptable risk and one justified by the strong compulsion they were under to arrest the refugee flow.