

September 11, 1961

MEMORANDUM TO THE PRESIDENT

FROM: WWR

It may be that you will wish to consider a major talk to the American people between now and the UN speech on September 21. The reasons are three.

-- It is possible that between now and then the USSR may circulate a draft treaty with East Germany; and it may explode a weapon in the hundred megaton range. Advance psychological preparation for these moves might be helpful.

-- There are some things you may wish to say to the world which might not be appropriate to a General Assembly talk. Although a talk to the American people must be intimately linked to and consistent with the UN speech, it may make sense to go into the UN having stated the fundamentals of the American national position as the foundation for your UN proposals.

-- In any case, there would appear to be in the country some eagerness to hear your voice and to feel your leadership. You have not spoken since West Berlin was blocked off from East Berlin, and since nuclear tests have been begun on both sides. The outside advisers brought in by General Taylor made this point very strongly.

The following is a draft outline for what such a speech might usefully contain.

Draft Fireside Chat Between September 12 and September 21

1. The crisis in which the world is caught up has been developing in recent weeks and you feel the need to communicate at this interim stage to the American people. There will be more to say at the forthcoming meeting of the UN; but you should like to share your views with the American public which has been watching the unfolding of events with the greatest concern.

2. The crisis over Berlin started with Mr. Khrushchev's 1958 statement that he proposed to make a separate treaty, and it is now reaching a crucial stage. The heart of the crisis over Berlin lies, as you have many times said, in the question of freedom of the West Berliners and in the rights of access to Berlin. It is fully understood in all quarters that the U.S. and its Allies are committed to protect by every means necessary these fundamentals of the Western position.

3. In recent weeks the crisis has been made more severe by two actions from the Soviet side: East Berlin has been blocked off from West Berlin; the Soviet Union has resumed atmospheric tests of nuclear weapons. In addition, the publication of a draft treaty between the Soviet Union and Eastern Germany is now threatened. It is to these actions that you first wish to address yourself.

4. The blocking of East from West Berlin violated a long-standing Four-Power agreement. This is not an issue on which the U.S. nor its Allies are prepared to go to war. On the other hand, this violation of the Four-Power status of West Berlin requires that we be prepared to take whatever steps we in the West may judge necessary to free our hands and to give West Berlin a foundation on which life may proceed in confidence. We have not hurried to make alternative arrangements for West Berlin because it is our hope that the Soviet Union might be persuaded to understand how unwise the splitting of Berlin is. In its own interest, in the interest of the German peoples, and in the interest of world peace, to split a city and to deny to a great nation the hope that it might achieve its unity by peaceful means is to create a most dangerous force on the world scene. The Soviet Union professes to be concerned with the rise of a militarist sentiment in West Germany. This is a grossly unfair charge. West Germany has accepted with grace and conviction the limitations imposed upon its rearmament in the wake of the Second World War. It has turned its energies not merely to its own recovery, but to constructive enterprises in Europe and on the world scene. It has been prepared to work patiently and peacefully towards the unification of the country. Those who would try to force a definitive agreement that Germany shall not be united and that Berlin shall remain a city split by barbed wire and concrete walls, threaten to bring about the attitudes and the historical forces they profess to fear. For our part, we shall take whatever steps in the West we believe necessary to protect the integrity and the future of West Berlin, but we shall do so while striving to keep open the possibility of an achievement of German unity, as well as the renewed unity of Berlin, on the basis of self-determination by peaceful means. (In the meanwhile, we would hope that the Soviet Union shall refrain from any further unilateral steps with respect to West Berlin.)

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5. The Soviet resumption of atmospheric testing -- evidently long prepared -- underlined the fact that the negotiations in Geneva had not been undertaken in good faith. We have responded first by offering to eliminate atmospheric testing -- which does not require organized international inspection; but this minimal step to ease tensions and to reduce the nuclear danger for all of mankind has been rejected. We have also responded by initiating underground nuclear tests within the U.S. As a matter of prudence and responsibility, we have long been preparing for such tests if the Geneva negotiations should break down or the Soviets should resume testing. The U.S. is clearly ahead of the Soviet Union in its nuclear arsenal. We have a vast stockpile of great flexibility. [I for one believe that it might not be unhelpful to state how big the American stockpile is.] But in certain important directions we have the knowledge necessary to increase the flexibility of our weapons. It is my responsibility, as Commander-in-Chief, to make sure that the American lead in nuclear weapons is maintained; and I, therefore, ordered that selective underground tests be undertaken.

6. Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the Soviet performance in recent weeks is the use of nuclear tests as a form of diplomatic blackmail. The destruction of the Acropolis has been threatened and the nations of Western Europe have been referred to as hostages to Moscow. On this matter I wish to speak with the greatest solemnity.

7. The impression has been cultivated in certain quarters that the balance of power has shifted in recent years. There are those who would urge that, in the face of this alleged fact, concessions should be given, rights and responsibilities should be surrendered.

8. I wish to say bluntly that in a military sense this is simply not true. So far as nuclear weapons are concerned, what has happened simply is that the power on both sides to kill vast numbers of human beings has increased. This is not a time for either side to boast of its strength in nuclear weapons or to measure how greatly its power to destroy has increased. It is enough to say that our own capacity to deliver destruction anywhere in the world has vastly increased. The truth is that in a world of modern weapons we are all hostages to each other -- not least the peoples of the Soviet Union. I suspect that those who would seek to spread this corrosive doctrine understand fully American strength; but they may feel that they have another advantage. They may feel that, because they operate in high secrecy, without

reference to public opinion within the areas they control, without independent and responsible allies, they can bring to bear effectively the threat of nuclear war; and by so doing induce others to back away from their responsibilities. This dangerous doctrine of nuclear blackmail will fail. The truth of the matter is that all men are equally brave and equally unwilling to surrender the things they cherish at the point of a pistol or in the shadow of a hundred megaton bomb. Unless this basic human fact is understood and accepted, the world will stand in the greatest danger.

9. Where do we go from here? So far as Berlin is concerned, our position is that our commitment to the people of West Berlin and to Western rights of access remain absolutely unchanged. It is our hope that the Soviet Union will take no further unilateral actions; but we shall be prepared to deal on our side with whatever eventuality should occur. We profoundly believe that the Berlin problem should be peacefully settled. We are preparing our own proposals concerning Berlin and Germany and we shall present them when a forum is established. We agree with Mr. Khrushchev that a summit meeting would do more harm than good unless it were fruitful; this means that there must be very careful diplomatic preparation for any such occasion. In the meanwhile, we shall work intimately with our Allies, the West Germans and the West Berliners to maintain not merely life in Berlin, but a creative role for that remarkable city in Europe and on the world scene. As Vice President Johnson said in Berlin, as they face the future the people of West Berlin and West Germany have every right to be confident of themselves and confident in their Allies.

10. As for the problem of nuclear tests and disarmament, we cannot accept passively a continuous deterioration of the position. We shall lay before the UN our own positive proposals on disarmament and with the help of the new Agency for Arms Control and Disarmament, we shall continue to maintain the initiative in devising and presenting proposals which would seriously grip the problem and lift from humanity the terrible burden of fear of nuclear war.

11. The problems of Berlin and disarmament are not the only crises we face. In Southeast Asia we are approaching a crucial stage in our negotiations to achieve a neutral and independent Laos. In Vienna Mr. Khrushchev and I agreed that our goal should be the creation by negotiation of a country neutral and independent, as for example, Cambodia and Burma. We shall leave no stone unturned in seeking that

kind of solution; but we are determined that the independence of the nations of Southeast Asia shall be maintained. To that end we are also working intimately with the government of South Viet-Nam to deal with the dangers of guerrilla war imposed on that nation from without. And we intend to continue to help the nations of that area in their struggle for independence against external pressure.

12. It is clear that we are living through a period of prolonged and dangerous crisis. I appeal to the American people that we build our strength, keep our nerve, and not permit the pressures of this crisis to result either in surrender or in war. In this connection, it is essential, while protecting the Free World, that we also continue to build up the strength and unity of the Free World. It is for that reason our foreign aid legislation -- and the enterprises we shall build with many nations on the basis of that legislation -- should go forward with energy and competence.