

**June 19, 1953**

**Minutes of Discussion at the 150th Meeting of the  
National Security Council, 18 June 1953**

**Citation:**

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**Summary:**

The US National Security Council discusses recent release of prisoners of war in South Korea. The riots and disturbances in East Germany and Czechoslovakia are discussed in the context of the general "softening" of Soviet policy. The Council also discusses the possibility of a four-power meeting, and other alternative courses of action.

**Original Language:**

English

**Contents:**

Transcript - English

Translation - English

TOP SECRET SECURITY INFORMATION  
EYES ONLY

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Subject: Discussion at the 150th Meeting of the  
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Present at the 150th meeting of the Council were the following: The President of the United States, presiding; the Vice President of the United States; the Secretary of State; the Secretary of Defense; and the Director for Mutual Security. Also present were the Secretary of the Treasury; the Director, Bureau of the Budget; Admiral Fechteler for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff; the Director of Central Intelligence; Robert Cutler, Special Assistant to the President; Lewis L. Strauss, Special Assistant to the President; C. D. Jackson, Special Assistant to the President; the Military Liaison Officer; the Executive Secretary, NSC; and the Deputy Executive Secretary, NSC.

There follows a summary of the discussion at the meeting and the chief points taken.

#### 1. Agenda for 150th NSC Meeting

The opening of the Council meeting was delayed three-quarters of an hour while the President conferred with the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Chief of Naval Operations and Assistant Secretary of Defense Frank Nash, with regard to the contents of a message from the President to [ROK President] Syngman Rhee. When the President entered the Cabinet Room at 10:45, Mr. Cutler suggested that, in view of the recent developments in Korea, the President might wish to postpone Council consideration of the regular agenda, since the agenda was largely concerned with items on the Far East which could not be considered until there was a clarification of the situation in South Korea.

The National Security Council:

Agreed that, in view of the development in Korea and East Germany action on the items scheduled for consideration at this meeting should be deferred.

#### 2. President Rhee's Release of Prisoners of War

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Mr. Jackson said that it was important to tie in what had happened in South Korea with the uprisings in East Germany and Czechoslovakia. Together, all these events provided a real chance to assay Communist strength and weakness. While we should certainly be stern with Rhee, it would be wrong not to push ahead for the armistice rather than to make any suggestion of withdrawal. The Communists themselves must be very agitated by the grave difficulties that they were confronting in East Germany and among the European satellites. We ought not ease this pressure, therefore, by any withdrawal from Korea which would provide a victory.

The President replied, facetiously, that if we were to play the game that Mr. Jackson suggested, it might be better to send a message of congratulation to President Rhee.

Mr. Stassen, agreeing with Mr. Jackson, said that it seemed to him vital to keep on stepping up pressure on the Communists. This pressure, which had begun to be applied by the President and Secretary Dulles five months ago, was really beginning to hurt, and cracks in the Soviet edifice were beginning to be visible. Of course, added Mr. Stassen, we will have problems to contend with as regards our allies, but we must not relax this pressure.

While agreeing with this point of view, the President nevertheless pointed out that the United States must either assume responsibility for President Rhee's action in releasing these prisoners, or else it must strongly repudiate that action. If we accept what has happened without protest, our allies would regard it as tantamount to abandoning the coalition. The Communists, too, would be quick to exploit our weaknesses, for what had happened in Korea was certainly no victory. It could be interpreted to mean that we could not even control the ROK. Communist propaganda would shout that either the United States had no influence on the Republic of Korea, or else that the United States was really responsible for what President Rhee had done. [. . .]

### 3. The Riots in East Germany and Czechoslovakia

The Director of Central Intelligence stated that he wished in his briefing to relate the recent events in East Berlin and Czechoslovakia to the series of developments which had resulted in what was called Molotov's "soft" policy. He then listed the specific actions of the Soviet Government with regard to Germany, and noted that the objective of all these actions was to support the Soviet policy for the unification of Germany in the interest of the Soviet Union. He then went on to describe the similar softening processes with regard to Austria, Yugoslavia, Greece, Iran, and Israel, culminating with a comment on the over-all Soviet objective of encouraging trade with the free world to the point of hinting their willingness to provide the free world with strategic materials in return for consumers goods. Mr. Dulles then noted the not less significant evidences of a relaxation of harshness within the Soviet Union itself. All these taken together, continued Mr. Dulles, obviously had not escaped the notice of the satellite peoples, who evidently were interpreting the soft policy as offering real possibilities of action against the Soviet Union without the terrible risks which would have been included under Stalin.

Mr. Dulles then turned to the riots in Czechoslovakia, and explained their origin and development so far as this was known. The conclusion one could draw from the riots in Pilsen [Plzen] was that the people of the satellites, of whom the Czechs were certainly the most phlegmatic and the least likely to rise in revolt, obviously felt bolder now that Stalin's hand was no longer there. Mr. Dulles also pointed out that our propaganda reaction to these events had been to play it very cautiously. We had carefully refrained from urging the Czechs to open revolt, while encouraging them to passive resistance and to prepare for future possibilities.

Mr. Dulles thereafter described in as much detail as possible the uprising in Berlin and East Germany, where, he pointed out, the Soviet relaxation program had likewise backfired. Mr. Dulles said that the United States had nothing whatsoever to do with inciting these riots, and that our reaction thus far had been to confine ourselves, in broadcasts which were not attributable, to expressions of sympathy and admiration, with an admixture of references to the great traditions of 1848. In summary, Mr. Dulles described what had happened as evidence of the boundless discontent and dissension behind the Iron Curtain, and added that it posed a very tough problem for the United States to know how to handle.

Mr. Cutler then invited Mr. C. D. Jackson to suggest the possibilities open to the United States in exploiting the difficulties which the Soviets had encountered.

Apropos of Mr. Dulles' conclusion, Mr. Jackson observed that while the riots revealed discontent, they were more important in showing, for the first time since their enslavement, that the slaves of the Soviet Union felt that they could do something. The thing had developed past the riot stage, and was moving close to insurrection. Our problem was whether or not to abet the development. It was perfectly possible to fan the flames of discontent, but if we did so we could be sure that heads would roll.

The President interposed to agree, and to add that the heads would be those of our friends.

Mr. Jackson resumed, and pointed out that the "64-dollar question" was precisely how far the United States was prepared to go "if this thing really gets cracking."

The President inquired whether Mr. Jackson meant that we should intervene to prevent slaughter by the Soviet forces.

Mr. Jackson replied, not only that, but it was quite possible that some of the satellite regimes were now prepared to follow the road that Tito had taken. Indeed, he added, this could be the bell pealing the disintegration of the Soviet empire. Do we stand idly by, or do we help the disintegration? And how much responsibility are we willing to take for the results of helping?

The President's first response was to say that this decision depended on how widespread the uprising became. Would the riots spread to China, or even possibly to the USSR itself? If this should happen, we would probably never have a better chance to act, and we would be well advised, for example, to supply arms.

The question of whether we should slip arms to the East Berliners, said Mr. Jackson, was one of the first of his questions.

The President answered that if to do so was just inviting a slaughter of these people, you certainly did not supply the arms. If, on the contrary, there was a real chance of success, you might well do so. Our problem was to weigh the prospects of success. In his opinion, the President added, the revolts would have to be more serious and more widespread than at this moment before they promised real success and indicated the desirability of our intervening.

Mr. Jackson agreed with the President's point, but added the question, do we help to make this movement more serious and more widespread?

The President stated his view that it was not quite the time yet. He felt that it was very important that the unrest spread to China, because while the USSR would have no great difficulty in crushing uprisings in Europe alone, they would find it tough to deal with trouble both in Europe and in the Far East.

Mr. Jackson then inquired whether the moment had not come when we should activate quickly one or more of the alternatives that were being studied by the Solarium project, and also whether we should not go ahead to carry out the Volunteer Freedom Corps program which had been temporarily put on the shelf. He added that Under Secretary Smith believed that we should go ahead promptly to begin negotiations with our allies regarding the VFC. Would the President authorize this?

The President said that it would seem sensible to him, and directed Mr. Jackson to talk with the Secretary of State, who had temporarily left the room. He wanted, added the President, to cause the enemy every possible difficulty. On the other hand, he did not wish to kill our friends.

Mr. Allen Dulles observed that great caution must be used in any distribution of arms to the participants in these uprisings. It would be foolish and dangerous to distribute

arms in countries where there were Soviet armed forces. On the other hand, Czechoslovakia was free of such forces, and the time might indeed be ripe to ship arms there and even to undertake to subvert the Czech National Army.

Mr. Jackson then said that it seemed to him most useful if the National Security Council would permit the Psychological Strategy Board to constitute itself a staff to direct the day-by-day follow-up of these riots in the satellite states, on the assumption that the PSB would be able to secure policy guidance from the National Security Council.

The President again reverted to the possibilities of an uprising or revolt in China, but was informed, both by Mr. Dulles and by Mr. Jackson, that there was no intelligence to indicate the likelihood of dissention in China, and, indeed, that a rising in that country was the most remote of all the current possibilities.

Mr. Stassen also agreed that the key areas were the European satellites. He listed all of them, and observed that in each instance the Soviet faced trouble of one kind and degree or another. It seemed plain to Mr. Stassen that there were men willing to die for their freedom in these areas and that each of them contained indigenous armed forces. If, as had been the case in East Germany, the Russians could not trust these indigenous forces and felt compelled to bring in their own troops, this should be taken as a sign of real promise.

The Secretary of State pointed out that his Department was giving a great deal of thought as to how it would be possible to engage in a four-power conference including the Russians without inevitably providing the latter with some degree of moral support of their tyranny and of depriving the dissident people of the satellites of all hope.

The President quickly replied that he had supposed he had made it crystal clear that if there were to be a four-power conference he himself would not be present. The Secretary of State could very well go, and confine himself to technicalities which would lend no semblance of moral support for Soviet imperialism.

As for a four-power conference, said Mr. Jackson, it was his opinion that the East Berliners had pulled out the rug from under the Kremlin. The Russians can scarcely come, in the circumstances, to any four-power conference posing as spokesman for a contented democratic Germany which only seeks to be re-united.

Mr. Allen Dulles stated that the whole object of all the moves that Foreign Minister Molotov had been making by way of softening the harshness of Soviet rule, was to divide the Western powers.

Secretary Dulles agreed, and added that in his view Molotov was undoubtedly the ablest and shrewdest diplomat since Machiavelli. He was determined to defeat and destroy European unity at this moment when it seemed on the very point of consummation.

Mr. Stassen expressed the view that the East Berlin uprising heavily underscored the necessity of getting more military strength more quickly into West Germany.

Commenting on the points just made, the President observed that the uprisings certainly had provided us with the strongest possible argument to give to Mr. Churchill against a four-power meeting. The United States should take a very strong position, both with our allies and with the Russians. There can be no four-power conference until the Russians have withdrawn their armies from East Germany, at

which time we would withdraw our armies from West Germany.

As for arms for West Germany, the President admitted that it was desirable to rearm that country just as rapidly as we could. The point was that Chancellor Adenauer was firmly and quite properly opposed to the creation of national German army, in view of what had happened in the past. He wants no such army until it is integrated under the EDC. What we must do is to throw all our weight behind the EDC objective. However, said the President in response to a question from Mr. Allen Dulles, we should certainly inquire of Chancellor Adenauer whether he now desired, as a matter of urgency, additional armament for his police force. The President said that he would do almost anything to help the German Chancellor.

Mr. Stassen then inquired as to whether there was any possibility that we could raise in the United Nations the issue of the forceful Russian repression of these uprisings. This would be one more way of adding to the pressures which the President and the Secretary of State had been applying to the Soviets.

The President agreed that this deserved consideration.

Secretary Wilson, reverting to the problem of President Rhee, expressed his own personal opinion that perhaps the "Rhee business" wasn't really too bad.

The President replied with some asperity that if Secretary Wilson felt that way, he had better get busy and say that we approve of what Rhee has done. Certainly we couldn't ride two horses at one time.

Mr. Stassen then said he wished to point out to the Council the ever-mounting pressure by our allies to relax the existing controls on trade with Communist China the moment the armistice was signed. He wondered, therefore, whether this was not the time to tighten control over trade with China, and perhaps to institute a naval blockade prior to the armistice.

The President expressed no sympathy for this latter proposal, but emphasized his feeling that the Secretary of State should use every diplomatic weapon at hand in order to encourage the British and our other allies to hold the line on trade with China until the end of the political negotiations. We should do our best to impress on our allies our conviction that the existing controls on trade had been one of the main reasons why the Chinese Communists had sought an armistice, and it was vital, therefore, not to relax controls until we had achieved a settlement.

Mr. Jackson then said that he desired the Council's guidance in the East German situation together and to find a policy thread upon which he could string the actions which this Government might take. Noting the hue and cry for free elections in Germany in the course of the riots, he stressed the importance of keeping this idea of free elections alive.

In response to Mr. Jackson's request for guidance, the President suggested that the Council really needed a report from the Psychological Strategy Board outlining the possible actions that could be taken under existing policy over the next sixty days or so. He would be perfectly willing to call a special meeting of the Council to take a look at such a report when it was complete, but prior to adopting any general policy with regard to these uprisings it was first necessary to see what specific actions we could take and to watch how developments unfolded. It was still his opinion, he said, that the time to "roll them out for keeps" is not yet.

Queried as to whether or not the Bermuda Conference would be held as scheduled for June 29, the President said "yes." He had just received a message from Churchill indicating belief that the French would have a government in time, and that in any case the Prime Minister would have to be back in London by July 7.

The National Security Council:

a. Noted an oral briefing by the Director of Central Intelligence on the events leading up to the recent East German and Czechoslovak riots, and the implications thereof for Soviet policy.

b. Discussed alternative courses of action open to the United States as a result of this evidence of popular opposition to Soviet control within the satellites, as presented by Mr. C. D. Jackson.

c. Noted that the President confirmed his authorization to proceed with the development of the Volunteer Freedom Corps (NSC 143/2) at such time as might be agreed upon by the Secretary of State and Mr. C. D. Jackson.

d. Agreed that the Secretary of State should:

(1) Inquire of Chancellor Adenauer as to his need for additional arms for the West German police forces.

(2) Consider raising in the United Nations the Soviet repression of the popular demonstrations in East Germany.

(3) Continue intensified efforts to persuade our allies to refrain from relaxing their controls on trade with Communist China in the event of a Korean armistice.

e. Requested the Psychological Strategy Board to prepare, for urgent Council consideration, at a special meeting if necessary, recommendations as to policies and actions to be taken during the next sixty days to exploit the unrest in the satellite states revealed by the recent East German and Czechoslovakian riots.

Note: The action in c above subsequently transmitted to the Secretary of State and Mr. C. D. Jackson. The action in d above subsequently transmitted to the Secretary of State for implementation. The action in e above subsequently transmitted to the Psychological Strategy Board for implementation. [...]

[Signed, "S. Everett Gleason"]

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- b. Discussed alternative courses of action open to the United States as a result of this evidence of popular opposition to Soviet control within the satellites, as presented by Mr. C. D. Jackson.
- c. Noted that the President confirmed his authorization to proceed with the development of the Volunteer Freedom Corps (NSC 143/2) at such time as might be agreed upon by the Secretary of State and Mr. C. D. Jackson.
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  - (2) Consider raising in the United Nations the Soviet repression of the popular demonstrations in East Germany.
  - (3) Continue intensified efforts to persuade our allies to refrain from relaxing their controls on trade with Communist China in the event of a Korean armistice.
- e. Requested the Psychological Strategy Board to prepare, for urgent Council consideration, at a special meeting if necessary, recommendations as to policies and actions to be taken during the next sixty days to exploit the unrest in the satellite states revealed by the recent East German and Czechoslovakian riots.

Note: The action in c above subsequently transmitted to the Secretary of State and Mr. C. D. Jackson. The action in d above subsequently transmitted to the Secretary of State for implementation. The action in e above subsequently transmitted to the Psychological Strategy Board for implementation. [...]

[Signed, "S. Everett Gleason"]