3-16-1959

Memo on the President's Speech

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The President really gave three speeches; one on the German crisis; another on the state of our national defense; and a third to boost mutual security--the foreign aid program.

Few will disagree with what he said on Berlin and Germany. It was reasoned and temperate, and showed a certain amount of flexibility. He said, in effect, that we will stand fast in Berlin but that we want negotiations, not war, as the way of solving the German problem. To that end, he said that we are prepared to listen to new ideas on the German problem and that we will be prepared to offer a few ourselves--at a Foreign Ministers' Conference and, later, at the summit. This approach is sound and in line with what the Secretary of State was trying to do before he went to the hospital. It may contain the initiative for peace which some Members of Congress and others have been urging. It remains to be seen what new ideas we will be prepared to listen to; more important, what new ideas we will be prepared to propose. One might hope that they will include some use of the U.N. in this situation.

As for his second speech--on the state of our defenses--the President says, in effect, that everything is fine. One hesitates to differ with his judgment--especially since he says he's had the best available advice on the subject and since he is an expert himself. But Members of Congress also have a responsibility and we have received conflicting testimony from the President's various military chiefs. One
would hope that the President would convince these military chiefs that everything was fine; then it would be easier to convince Congress. In this matter, it may be a case not of more money but of better utilization of appropriated funds. We may need more soldiers on the line and less generals in the Pentagon. We need less wild-spending as a result of careless purchasing and pointless service rivalries--wild spending which has built up a waste of $60 billion in surplus military equipment which is now deteriorating in the warehouses and which the government will now try to sell, probably at a fraction of cost.

The President's final speech was an out-and-out plea for the foreign aid program. Without denying the importance of this program, one must question the way it has been administered in recent years. We have reports of great waste, particularly in military aid; of private planes being built out of these funds for foreign generals; of overlapping and duplication in administration. Then, too, we have had outbursts of resentment against this nation, often, in the very countries where foreign aid has been heaviest. All of this leads to a strong presumption that we need a lot less money and a lot more brains in how we use these billions under the foreign aid program. Congress is going to want to take a very careful look at this entire business.