CABINET

THE BERLIN AIRLIFT

Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs

The Problem.

When it became apparent at the recent Conference of Foreign Ministers that a limited agreement would be concluded providing for the maintenance of the New York Agreement and an improvement in the land communications between Berlin and the Western zones, I gave careful consideration to the future of the Berlin airlift. It seemed to me that it would be imprudent to liquidate the organisation until the situation was clearer and until we had accumulated in Berlin sufficient stocks to see us safely over the winter in the event of the reimposition of the blockade. I calculated that for this purpose five months' stocks would be required (i.e. to cover the period from 1st November, 1949, to 1st April, 1950), and I instructed the Military Governor to prepare an estimate showing what target figure would be required for this purpose. General Robertson replied that approximately 1,100,000 tons of stocks represented about five months' supplies for the city of Berlin. I accordingly approached the United States Secretary of State and secured his agreement to the continuance of the airlift on a sufficient scale to ensure stock piling of 1,100,000 tons of supplies in Berlin before 1st November. It was estimated at the time that an airlift of about 50 per cent of the maximum capacity would be sufficient to attain our ends, but after further discussion it was felt that it would be more practical and more economical in the long run to take advantage of the fine summer weather to maintain a maximum airlift and so to bring stocks up to the required level before the target date of 1st November. In accordance with this policy the airlift has been importing about 8,000 tons a day into Berlin during the last month, and stocks have already risen to approximately 600,000 tons.

2. In these circumstances the British and United States Military Governors have reviewed the situation, and I annex three telegrams from General Robertson, in which he estimates that the target stock pile will be built up within approximately 35 days, and recommends that immediate orders should be given for the reduction of the airlift by phases, and the re-deployment of the air forces on a proportionate basis. He also recommends that two Troop Carrier Groups of the United States Air Force, and two Heavy Transport Squadrons of the R.A.F., should remain in Germany, and that the United Kingdom and United States Governments should take steps to ensure that the airlift can be built up again so as to attain the full scale within a period of 90 days. To this end each Air Force in Germany should ensure that installations within its control are maintained sufficiently to ensure that the airlift can be built up again within this period.
Recommendation.

3. I recommend that General Robertson should be informed that his proposals are approved.

The Considerations.

4. As General Robertson points out, there is a limit to the amount which can physically or economically be stocked in Berlin. I regard a five month's stock as satisfactory for our purposes, on the assumption that stocks are well-balanced. The existence of such stocks in Berlin will not only tend to discourage the Russians from interfering with our communications, but it will give the inhabitants of Berlin a sense of security and will enable us to prepare in good time for the resumption of the airlift in the unlikely event of the re-imposition of the blockade. On the other hand, the continuance of the airlift for a day longer than is necessary could not be justified. Not only does it impose a serious financial and economic burden on this country and tie up a large proportion of our carrying capacity, but also it increases considerably the financial and economic difficulties of the German administrations both in Berlin and the Western zones, particularly as regards requisitioning of services, billets, etc. There is therefore a strong case for reducing the scale of the airlift as speedily as possible, provided always that an adequate margin is left to cover our basic security requirements and to ensure that the successful stand which we have, thanks to the airlift, been able to make in Berlin is not imperilled.

5. It will be seen from the calculations set out in General Robertson's telegrams that we shall have during September and October a reserve carrying capacity, both by rail and barge and, if necessary, in the air, which should suffice to cover any additional requirements which may arise. No allowance has been made for the carriage of raw materials for industry nor for miscellaneous consumer goods which are largely brought in by road. Road transport does, however, furnish an additional reserve capacity in case of need, but it has been excluded from the present calculations. The two Military Governors intend to observe the position carefully from week to week in order to make any necessary adjustments if deliveries fail to come up to expectations. They will also decide how best to employ any reserve carrying capacity which may become available.

6. Although I should hope that the arrangements for building up and maintaining the stock-pile in Berlin, which have been recommended by the British and United States Military Governors, would be sufficient to deter the Russians from attempting to re-impose the blockade, we must clearly take steps to see that there is an adequate organisation left on the ground in Germany to enable the airlift to be built up again swiftly if the need should arise. To this end the two Military Governors have in particular recommended that two Troop Carrier Groups of the United States Air Force and two heavy Transport squadrons of the R.A.F. should remain in Germany. I strongly support this recommendation, which appears to be a modest and reasonable insurance against further trouble. From the general political point of view I attach great importance to the retention by the United States Government of some of their heavy aircraft in Germany. This can only be ensured if we play our part. If, therefore, the United States Government are prepared to keep two Carrier Groups, I strongly recommend that we should contribute two Transport squadrons.
7. If the recommendations made by General Robertson are approved there will be a number of consequential matters which will require to be settled, such as the respective rates of reduction between R.A.F. machines and civilian aircraft. I recommend to my colleagues that these matters should be left to be settled by the existing inter-Departmental machinery.

E. B.

Foreign Office, S.W. 1.

15TH JULY, 1949.
ANNEX

1. Telegram from Berlin (Military Governor) to Foreign Office, No. 1011, dated 14th July, 1949.

In accordance with instructions received from their Governments the United States and United Kingdom Military Governors with their Air Force Commanders discussed today the future of the Berlin airlift.

2. In their instructions the Military Governors have been told to plan for a stock pile in Berlin of 4 to 5 months estimated at 1,100,000 metric tons. The question as to whether this figure of 1,100,000 metric tons actually represents 4 to 5 months' stock depends upon the bases of calculation assumed for consumption of various commodities. For example an important difference would be introduced by varying the quantity of domestic fuel to be allowed during the winter. However the Military Governors are agreed that a figure of the magnitude of 1,100,000 metric tons can be regarded as the maximum that is practicable from the point of view of storage and finance.

3. Stocks in Berlin today are approximately 600,000 metric tons. The intake by all means of transport except road is approximately 19,000 tons. Consumption is 5,000 tons. Therefore there is a daily gain of approximately 14,000 tons. At this rate the target stock pile will be built up within approximately 35 days.

4. The Military Governors therefore consider that immediate steps to reduce the airlift by phases are necessary. According to the advice given them by their Air Force Commanders the fastest practicable rate of phase-out would have the effect of reducing the available airlift to 5,000 metric tons for one month, 3,000 metric tons during the second month and 1,800 metric tons thereafter. This shows the need for an urgent decision for re-deployment of the air forces.

5. The Military Governors therefore recommend that orders for re-deployment should be given forthwith in accordance with the maximum practicable rate as proposed by the Air Force Commanders given in paragraph 4 above. They calculate that if these orders become effective from 1st August the target stock pile will have been achieved by 31st August and it will be unnecessary to make use of the airlift during the second phase of re-deployment. However they undertake to observe the position carefully from week to week in order to make any adjustments that may be necessary due to the forecast of deliveries not coming up to expectation.

6. In the above calculations no allowance has been made for the carriage of raw materials for industry nor for consumer goods. On the other hand no credit has been taken for road transport and it is by this means that most of these commodities are reaching Berlin at the moment. Nor has any credit been taken for supplies being received direct into Berlin from the Eastern Zone. Moreover the figure assumed for tonnage by rail excludes two rail paths which are being used for express freight trains for non-stock-piles items.

7. The Military Governors recommend that re-deployment should affect the United States Air Force and the R.A.F. proportionately, details to be worked out between the Air Force Commanders.
8. When the stock pile has been completed there will still be a surplus of intake capacity by rail and barge over requirements of some 6,000 tons daily. The utilisation of this surplus will depend primarily upon the possibilities of finance. Towards the end of the year the surplus will be greatly reduced through increased winter consumption and cessation of barge traffic due to freezing of canals.

9. With regard to the question of the possible resumption of the airlift in the event of the reimposition of the blockade the Military Governors have the following recommendations to make:

   (A) That two troop carrier groups U.S.A.F. and two heavy transport squadrons R.A.F. remain in Germany.

   (B) That their Governments make appropriate arrangements to ensure that the airlift can be built up again so as to attain full scale within a period of 90 days.

   (C) That each Air Force in Germany shall ensure that installations within its control are maintained sufficiently to ensure that the airlift can be built up again at the rate given in (B) above.

10. The Military Governors ask for a very early decision of the above recommendations. They are also of the opinion that when approval has been received they should make a joint statement to the press of their intentions regarding the future of the airlift without going into much detail.

2. Telegram from Berlin (Military Governor) to Foreign Office, No. 1012, dated 14th July, 1949.

   My telegram No. 1011 is an agreed telegram with General Hays who is despatching an identical telegram to his Government.

   There is some argument between our staffs about the figures in paragraph 3 particularly as regards the maximum quantity of coal that can be received and handled in Berlin. This argument does not affect the conclusion of the telegram viz. that the air forces should now be re-deployed at the fastest practicable rate.

   We will watch the stock position carefully and have plenty of margin for safety in the fact that there will be an available air-lift during the second phases of re-deployment of 3,000 tons per day which we are not expecting to require.

   Liquid fuel stocks are already adequate to cover requirements to March, 1950. Allied requirements are catered for separately.

3. Telegram from Berlin (Military Governor) to Foreign Office, No. 1014, dated 14th July, 1949.

   My telegram 1011. United States/United Kingdom Military Governors' recommendations on the future of the airlift.

   If the reductions in lift recommended in that signal are accepted, a progressive reduction in numbers of British aircraft will be possible. Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief is in communication with the Air Ministry on this point, with particular reference as to which types of aircraft should be released. It is requested that you will discuss the question of release of civil dry freighters with Air Ministry, as it is understood they may wish for the early release of certain R.A.F. machines.