WAR CABINET.

SCALE OF ATTACK AGAINST THE UNITED KINGDOM.

REPORT BY THE CHIEFS OF STAFF.

WE endorse the attached report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee on the scale of air attack against the United Kingdom.

2. We are reviewing the air defences of Great Britain in the light of this report.

(Signed) A. F. BROOKE.
C. PORTAL.
ANDREW CUNNINGHAM.

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1,
27th October, 1944.

[ J.I.C. (44) 446 (O) (Final).]
25th October, 1944.

WAR CABINET.

Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee.

SCALE OF AIR ATTACK AGAINST THE UNITED KINGDOM.

REPORT BY THE JOINT INTELLIGENCE SUB-COMMITTEE.

AS instructed,* we re-assess in this paper the likelihood and possible scale of air attack against the United Kingdom. We do not assess the scale of attack by flying bombs or other long-range weapons.

Overall Strength of the G.A.F. Long-Range Bomber Force.

2. Since our last paper on this subject,+ dated the 28th August, 1944, many units of the German long-range bomber force have been disbanded and the total strength of the force has already declined from 900 to 625 aircraft, including all anti-shipping units and units engaged in launching flying-bombs. Moreover,

* J.I.C. (44) 588 (G) Final.
+ C.O.S. (44) 349th Meeting (O), Item 2.

[28481]
nearly two-thirds of the total surviving force has been withdrawn from operations. The process of dissolution and the withholding from normal operations of the surviving elements are expected to continue for the following reasons:

(a) Production of long-range bombers is steadily declining, and has now fallen to less than half the Spring 1944 figure.
(b) Training of long-range bomber crews has been virtually suspended.
(c) The expanding fighter arm continues to recruit air crews from the long-range bomber force.
(d) The demand for long-range bombers for launching flying bombs is expected to increase the numbers so employed from 25-30 to at least 75-100 during the next few months, thereby reducing the bomber force available for normal operations.
(e) Substantial numbers of ground personnel from the long-range bomber units continue to be drafted as replacements in Army, S.S. and parachute divisions, as technicians in industry or for the expansion of the fighter arm.
(f) Germany’s acute shortage of aviation spirit has almost certainly been the principal reason for the virtual grounding of the German long-range bomber force, both on the Western and Eastern fronts, for over two months. Even if the scale of air attack on oil production is somewhat reduced owing to winter conditions, we do not expect a substantial increase in the output of aviation spirit. Production of petrol for the land forces, and to some extent of fuel for fighter aircraft, competes with that of fuel for long-range bombers. In view of the more urgent claims of the land forces and of fighter training and operations, we do not think that any small increase in output will result in increased allocations to the long-range bomber forces.

3. Apart from the units engaged in launching flying-bombs, the only elements of the long-range bomber force which are likely to survive over a period are such specialist units as those engaged in sea-mining, anti-shipping operations and attacks on railways on the Eastern Front. While these specialist units may on occasion be allotted fuel for particularly important operations, fuel is only likely to be made available to ordinary long-range bomber units, so long as they survive, in an emergency for defensive operations in tactical support of the land fighting.

Availability of Forces for attacks on the United Kingdom.

4. Long-Range Bombers.—Since the date of our last report the long-range bomber force in the West has only operated twice, on both occasions in close tactical support of the German ground forces, during the defensive emergency at Arnhem. Moreover, its strength has already declined from 275 to 50 aircraft, excluding those operating flying-bombs, and there is evidence to suggest that it will decline still further. While theoretically this force could be reinforced from units in Germany at present non-operational, the limiting factors—set out in paragraph 2 above—will combine to make any reinforcement extremely and increasingly unlikely even on a temporary basis.

5. Fighter-Bombers.—While jet-propelled fighter-bombers might be made available in small numbers for daylight bombing attacks on this country, it is unlikely that they will in practice be diverted from their other and more important roles in support of the ground forces and in reconnaissance.

Efficiency of the Forces Available.

6. The steadily progressing eclipse of the long-range bomber force, the withdrawal for the fighter arm of its best crews, the increasing lack of operational experience and the prolonged period of inactivity must inevitably result in a rapid decline in the morale and potential efficiency of the surviving elements. No attack which they undertook against this country would be concentrated, nor would it be pressed home.

Likelihood of Attack against the United Kingdom.

7. In addition to the shortage of aviation spirit and the small and declining size of the long-range bomber force, most of which will be held in reserve for
emergencies and special tasks, the following factors will also militate against the likelihood of attacks on the United Kingdom:—

(a) The enemy will appreciate that owing to the increasing paucity and overall inefficiency of the forces available, he could achieve no strategic results.

(b) Harassing attacks can be delivered by air-launched flying bombs at a far lighter cost in aircraft, air crews and aviation spirit.

(c) As the Allies extend their hold on the Continent, develop their night-fighter forces there and drive the G.A.F. further East, the range at which forces attacking this country would have to operate will increase, they would become more vulnerable en route to and from the target and the efficiency of their attacks would decrease.

For all the above reasons we think it unlikely that the Germans will attempt to bomb any targets in the United Kingdom.

Possible Effect of Relaxation of the Blackout.

8. If the blackout restrictions were relaxed in London and South-East England it is just possible that the Germans might attempt to score a cheap political victory by making one or two experimental bombing attacks on the London area, in the hope that this would lead to the reimposition of the full blackout restrictions and a consequent lowering of morale. We consider it very doubtful whether the Germans would, in practice, think the chances of achieving this result worth the effort. If the raids did not speedily lead to a reimposition of the blackout they would almost certainly be abandoned.

Possible Scale of Attack by Night.

9. Even if the Germans, contrary to our belief, did for any reason carry out night bombing attacks against the United Kingdom, the maximum force employed on any one night would probably not exceed 40 aircraft carrying 1½ to 2 tons each. This scale of effort could not be kept up for more than two nights in close succession. In no circumstances need any sustained attack be expected.

Possible Scale of Attack by Day.

10. Any daylight attacks would at most only be occasional and would probably be confined to small-scale sneak raids by jet-propelled fighter bombers, carrying not more than ½ ton of bombs each, against targets in South-East England.

Probable Targets.

11. If any attacks were made by long-range bombers, their target would almost certainly be the London area. Elsewhere, in view of the range at which an attacking force would now have to operate, the risk of any attack West of a line running North and South through London is negligible.

Conclusions.

12. We think it unlikely that the Germans will carry out night attacks on any targets in the United Kingdom.

13. We also think it unlikely that the Germans will undertake any daylight attacks on the United Kingdom. At the most such attacks would only be occasional and would probably be confined to small-scale sneak raids by jet-propelled fighter-bombers, carrying not more than ½-ton of bombs each, against targets in South-East England.

14. If the blackout restrictions were relaxed in London and South-East England it is just possible that the Germans might attempt one or two attacks on the London area, in the hope that this would lead to the reimposition of the full blackout restrictions and a consequent lowering of morale. We consider it very doubtful whether the Germans would, in practice, think the chances of achieving this result worth the effort.
15. Even if the Germans, contrary to our belief, did for any reason carry out night bombing attacks against the United Kingdom, the maximum force employed on any one night would probably not exceed 40 aircraft, carrying 1½ to 2 tons each. This scale of effort could not be kept up for more than two nights in close succession. Attacks would not be concentrated or pressed home. In no circumstances need any sustained attack be expected.

16. If any attacks were made by long-range bombers their target would almost certainly be the London area. The risk of any attack West of a line running North and South through London is negligible.

(Signed) V. CAVENDISH-BENTINCK.
J. A. SINCLAIR.
I. M. R. CAMPBELL (for D.N.I.).
G. W. P. GRANT (for A.C.A.S.(I)).

Offices of the War Cabinet, S.W. 1.
25th October, 1944.