Minutes of a meeting between E. Bevin, British Foreign Secretary, G. Marshall, US Secretary of State, and R. Schuman[[1]](#footnote-1), Prime Minister of France, dated 21 September 1948[[2]](#footnote-2)

BERLIN DISPUTE

MR. BEVIN opened the discussion by saying that the meeting had to decide whether it was necessary to send a final note to the Soviet Government terminating the conversations, or an intermediate note summarising briefly the issues outlined in the Western Powers Aide Memoire of the 14th September, stating that the Soviet Government’s replies were unsatisfactory and explaining the final position of the Western Powers on these three points. He suggested that the Note should add that further negotiations were impossible while the blockade continued, and it should go on to ask the Soviet Government to lift the blockade and to name the day on which they would do so.

MR. BEVIN AND MR. SCHUMAN defended strongly the idea of an intermediate Note. They thought it was essential to clarify their own position and to consider parliamentary opinion in their countries. They thought that it might be possible to combine the proposal for an intermediate Note with the idea which the U.S. Delegation seemed to favour, namely that emphasis should be laid on the Soviet denial of the Western Powers’ rights and obligations.

MR. MARSHALL met MR. BEVIN AND MR. SCHUMAN on this point. There were two considerations, however, which were dominant in his thought. In the first place the United States air experts had carefully considered the question and now had no doubt whatsoever about their ability to continue the air-lift throughout the winter. In the second place, while the Western Powers had made great gains in Germany, the Russians were losing heavily. Their only strong card was the blockade. Even there, however, Berlin was like Malta in the war and the Russians were clearly surprised by its resistance, thanks to the air-lift. Everywhere else the Russians were losing the battle. Accordingly, while prepared to agree to an intermediate Note, Mr. Marshall did not want to repeat the process of the last exchange of Notes. We must have a direct question and a clear understanding that in the absence of a satisfactory reply we would go to the United Nations.

[…]

[TNA, FO 800/467]

Keywords: great power relations, post-war Western Europe

1. Schuman, (Jean-Baptiste Nicholas) Robert (1886 - 1963) - French statesman. French Minister of Finance (1946 - 1947), Prime Minister of France (1947 - 1948), French Foreign Minister (1948 - 1953), French Justice Minister (1955 - 1956), First President of the European Parliamentary Assembly (1958 - 1960). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See also the more detailed minutes of the meeting on the 21st September in United States State Department / *Foreign relations of the United States, 1948. Germany and Austria,* Volume II (1948), 1177-1179. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)