Cabinet conclusions on developments in Berlin, dated 10 September 1948

[…]

The supply of Berlin by air had been well maintained and plans were being made for continuing it, if necessary, throughout the winter months. The development of the West German constitution was proceeding satisfactorily and a draft providing for a federation of German Lander had been accepted by the main Parties as a basis for discussion. The Germans had been most anxious to associate representatives of Berlin with these constitutional developments and, although it had been made clear that full representation of Berlin on the Parliamentary Council was impossible, Berlin representatives had attended as observers and advisers.

The Foreign Secretary said that it was impossible to forecast the outcome of the present conversations but that, in his view, the Soviet Government would probably be glad to see a settlement of the Berlin difficulties, since the existing situation was damaging to the trade of the Soviet Zone and German opinion was being increasingly alienated. He had made it clear to the United States Government that he regarded as premature any attempt to settle what line should be taken in the event of a breakdown of the conversations, but his provisional view was that it would be necessary to issue a White Paper giving a full account of the course of events. It would obviously be embarrassing to make a statement in Parliament in the coming week, when the conversations would still be in progress, and he hoped it would be possible to postpone any debate on foreign affairs until the week beginning 20th September.

The Cabinet were informed that arrangements were being made to postpone the House of Commons debate on foreign affairs until the second week of the new Session. It had, however, been thought desirable that a statement on the defence preparations which the Cabinet had approved should be made by the Government spokesman in the Debate on the Address on 14th September, since it had been regarded as certain that the Opposition would raise this matter at the earliest possible opportunity. It should be possible for the Government spokesman to explain why the Foreign Secretary was not able to make a full statement on foreign affairs until the following week and, if this were done, it was reasonable to suppose that Members would avoid raising questions connected with the international situation during the first week. There would be no difficulty in postponing a debate on foreign affairs in the House of Lords until the second week of Session.

The Cabinet –

(1) Took note of the statement by the Foreign Secretary about the situation in Germany and of the proposed arrangements for debates on foreign affairs in the forthcoming Session.

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[TNA, CAB 128/13/59]

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