Cabinet minutes of the Foreign Secretary’s update on the latest developments in the situation in Germany, dated 28 June 1948

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4. *The Foreign Secretary* informed the Cabinet of the latest developments in the situation in Germany. In view of the suggestions published in the Soviet-controlled press in Berlin, the Foreign Office had issued a statement over the weekend confirming the Government’s intention to maintain their position in Berlin and the United States Government were being asked to make a similar statement. There could be no question of yielding to Soviet pressure; if the Western Allies were forced out of Berlin, the project of Western Union would be fatally weakened. Every effort must be made to increase the existing food stocks for the civil population in the British sector of the city. This could not be done by air alone, and steps had been taken to expand the air services into the city. It seemed possible that the Soviet Government might try to secure an agreement on Four-Power control of the Ruhr in return for permitting the resumption of rail and water traffic into the Western Zones. There was no foundation for their allegation that we were failing to carry out the terms of an agreement on this issue: the United Kingdom Delegation had declined to discuss the matter at the Potsdam Conference on the ground that the French Government was not represented. The implications of the statement issued by the Soviet Government at the conclusion of the Warsaw Conference were being studied, and he would circulate a paper on this subject to the Cabinet.

*The Minister of Defence* said that the Chiefs of Staff were consulting the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington about the situation. The British Military Governor had confirmed that nothing would be gained by attempting to force through convoys by rail, road or water, since the Soviet authorities could interpose effective technical obstacles. Attention must therefore be concentrated on expanding the use of freight aircraft. At the present time, the Royal Air Force could bring into the city a daily load of 75 tons, but this could be increased very shortly to 400 tons and, by 3rd July, to 750 tons. This was the maximum daily load which could be transported by this means, and it would not be possible to maintain this rate for longer than a month. The Principal Administrative Officers Committee were considering to what extent dehydrated foods could be substituted for other supplies. The United States Air Force were at present transporting 1,000 tons a day by air into their sector. The Military Governor had reported that the Soviet authorities might attempt to interfere with air traffic either by fighter aircraft or by barrage balloons: instructions had been given that the risk of interference by fighters must be accepted but barrage balloons should be shot down.

The Cabinet –

(1) Took note of the statements by the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Defence;

(2) Approved the instructions given to the British Military Governor in Germany regarding the maintenance of air communication with Berlin;

(3) Took note that a special meeting of Ministers would be held later in the day to review the situation in detail.

[TNA, CAB 128/13/44]

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