Telegram from the British Embassy in Berlin to the Foreign Office, London, regarding the British position in Berlin, dated 10 August 1948

TOP SECRET

Your telegram No. 1,813.

1. Our position is fundamentally weak because we cannot stay in Berlin indefinitely in defiance of the Soviet Union.

2. I have provided you with an estimate of supply requirements which show that to maintain the present low standard of economy we need an average of 1,800 metric tons per day from the beginning of August through the winter. We are, as you know, well below this average at present which means that we have a backlog already. Estimates of the air-lift available to compete with this requirement can, I think, [be] better [estimated] in London than here. I see no reason to change the opinion which I have always held on this subject, namely that it is not possible to keep Berlin supplied by air through the winter. Taking into account the effect of weather I do not believe that the Allies will be able to provide an air-lift sufficient to compete with the requirements as stated above. Moreover, even if they did so I am extremely doubtful whether we could hold the city on the basis of the low standard of living for a protracted period which even this estimate of the requirements would necessitate. The resistance of the people depends upon their faith in an ultimately favourable solution. As the weeks go by this faith will fail.

3. Our currency position is also weak. There is very great dissatisfaction in the western sectors already. This dissatisfaction will mount unless we take the only course which could cure it, namely to make the western mark the exclusive currency in the western sectors. The Allied financial advisers remain strongly opposed to this because they say that it would impair the currency position in the western zones.

4. I do not think that the Soviets are likely to exert direct pressure against Allied personnel in Berlin because that course would certainly lead to war. As regards pressure on the Germans, there is no doubt much that they can still devise. We have no effective means of protecting persons who are members of the Magistrat, leading politicians etc. Large-scale abductions are always within their power. Sabotage by German henchmen of power stations etc. could do us great damage. However their most effective means of pressure would be to ferment and take advantage of disturbances in the western sectors which are only too likely to result from the prolongation of the present situation and the increase of unemployment.

5. With regard to the Soviet position, there is no doubt that they have lost ground heavily in the political field and have forfeited any chance of winning the majority of the Germans over to themselves for many years to come. With regard to the economic position in the Soviet zone we have sent you several reports recently which indicate that the position is bad. We are satisfied that these reports represent the position fairly. A prolongation of the blockade and of the interruption of traffic between their zone and the west will increase the difficulties. These factors are liable to weigh with the Soviets when it comes to considering any compromise with ourselves. On the other hand, I believe that it would be a very great mistake to suppose that they will sacrifice their main position on account of their own difficulties. The trouble about the Russians is that they are quite ready to accept a bad economic position in their zone and to deal with any disturbances or other trouble which may arise from it with ruthlessness.

6. I should like a little more time to consider your paragraph 3, but this is in any case mainly a matter for attention at your end.

7. The obvious conclusion from the above is that if we can find a half-way house it would be better to accept it rather than admit a breakdown. However, it must be a half-way house and not the whole way. I am doing what I can to discover such a solution and have sent you certain ideas in my telegrams Nos.1593 and 1595. The main objective it seems to me, is to convince the Soviets that Four-Power discussions on the whole German problem are in their interest as well as ours and that we sincerely desire to find a solution through them. This being the case it must be a matter of mutual interest to arrange a modus vivendi in Berlin which keeps the position there in equilibrium pending these Four-Power discussions.

8. I am not repeating this telegram to the other recipients of your No.1815.

[TNA, FO 800/467]

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