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NSC 24

COPY NO. 1



A REPORT

TO THE

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

by

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

on

U. S. MILITARY COURSES OF ACTION WITH  
RESPECT TO THE SITUATION IN BERLIN

July 28, 1948

WASHINGTON

DECLASSIFIED  
E. O. 11652, Sec. 5(B) and 5(D) at (\*)  
APC  
GWD Series, April 19, 1974  
By SP-7/... NARS Date 3-26-76

~~TOP SECRET~~

July 28, 1948

NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

to the

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

U. S. MILITARY COURSES OF ACTION WITH  
RESPECT TO THE SITUATION IN BERLIN



At the request of the Secretary of Defense, the enclosed memorandum, forwarding the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the subject, is circulated herewith for the information of the National Security Council and for discussion at its next meeting.

SIDNEY W. SOUERS  
Executive Secretary

Distribution:

- The Secretary of State
- The Secretary of Defense
- The Secretary of the Army
- The Secretary of the Navy
- The Secretary of the Air Force
- The Chairman, National Security Resources Board

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E.O. 11652, Sec. 3(E) and 3(F) or (G)  
DATE 2-11-76  
By M.T. HEN... NARS Date 3-25-76

C O P Y

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
Washington

26 July 1948

MEMORANDUM FOR THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL:

Subject: U. S. Military Courses of Action with  
Respect to the Situation in Berlin

I am forwarding herewith, for the information of the National Security Council, the following views which have been expressed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff on the matter of United States military courses of action with respect to the situation in Berlin:

The following discussion is intended to set forth in general terms, and from the military viewpoint, the salient features of the present Berlin situation. The Joint Chiefs of Staff are prepared to supply such further and more detailed information as may be requested. They would appreciate opportunity to comment on such determination as may later be reached by the National Security Council on aspects of the situation in Berlin that have military implications.

As a fundamental basis for consideration of the Berlin problem, it is assumed that it is United States policy to maintain our position in Berlin. This makes it essential to examine the courses of action that this policy necessitates and those to which it may lead.

Careful study of results to date, together with calculations of Berlin supply requirements and maximum air transport capabilities, indicates that minimum requirements can be met by air transport. This will entail augmentation of the present air transport effort to the greatest possible extent. This in turn will further and seriously reduce our air capabilities for implementing emergency war plans including the essential support by the Military Air Transport Service of those plans. Also, there will be a major and serious drain on available supplies of aviation gasoline, which may necessitate special action to provide necessary controls to overcome the inherent peacetime difficulty of meeting the heavy additional aviation gasoline demand and maintaining adequate reserve stocks.

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E. O. 11652, Sec. 3(1) and 3(D) & (7)  
DATE 2-8-76  
BY SP-6/ML  
NSA DATE 3-25-76  
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The daily cost of air transport supply operations is already very great and will naturally increase with augmentation of tonnage. In addition, it should be borne in mind that even augmented air lift can include little provision for clothing, maintenance material, raw material, or industrial supplies, which means that conditions in the western sectors of Berlin including unemployment, morale, and stamina of the population will steadily worsen even though food, medical, military, coal, gasoline, and Diesel supplies remain adequate for maintaining an existence level for the population.

Finally, it is always possible that the Soviets may devise and employ means, by interference in the air corridor, of vitiating or stopping air transport operations, or by other pressures within Berlin nullifying its purpose.

Nevertheless, as initially stated, minimum Berlin supply requirements can be met by air transport for at least a considerable, though probably not an indefinite, period. For this reason, the Joint Chiefs of Staff are firmly of the opinion that air transport supply should be continued and should be augmented immediately as necessary to meet the minimum requirements since this is providing and should continue to provide a cushion of time during which some other solution to the Berlin problem may be found and during which appropriate action may be taken toward meeting all eventualities.

Careful consideration has been given to the alternative of attempting to supply Berlin by armed convoy if the air transport method proves inadequate or is hampered or prevented by air corridor interference. The possibility of success in resort to this alternative is remote unless a favorable change in Soviet attitude be presupposed or, a still more remote possibility, unless the attempt in itself causes a favorable change. If a favorable change in Soviet attitude is to be presupposed, then it follows that the armed convoy method would be unnecessary. In any case, Soviet passive interference, such as road and bridge obstruction or destruction, could make the armed convoy method abortive, while Soviet interference by military action, whether simply for prevention or deliberately as a result of war decision, would not only make the convoy method abortive but would shift the stage from one of local friction to that of major war involvement.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that plans should be made for attempting to supply Berlin by composite armed convoy (British, French, and United States) so that we may be ready

for such an attempt if and when the developing situation and higher decision justify and necessitate this course of action. They are at present definitely of the opinion, however, for reasons given in the preceding paragraph, that such an attempt should not now be made and that any such attempt in the future should be accompanied by both determination and readiness on the part of the United States to meet the distinctly probable consequence of war.

It is assumed that diplomatic effort together with all practicable counter-pressure will continue to be used to arrive at peaceful solution of the Berlin problem. In this connection, it may not be altogether out of the question to consider, during the time that is to be gained by concentration of major effort on air transport supply, the possibility that some justification might be found for withdrawal of our occupation forces from Berlin without undue loss of prestige. Although this course is contrary to the assumption as to maintaining our position in Berlin on which this discussion is based, the possibility remains that reasonable justification, such as humanitarian consideration for the population of the western sectors of Berlin, might develop. Therefore, subject to unalterable decision that withdrawal in no circumstances will be undertaken unless forced by war action, the withdrawal possibility should at least be borne in mind. The development of plans for such a solution appears desirable, as neither air transport nor armed convoy in themselves offer a long-range solution to the problem.

Returning to the Berlin supply problem, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that to attempt to supply Berlin by force is, from the military viewpoint, justifiable only if:

- a. Every other possible solution has first failed or been discarded,
- b. Current evaluation indicates that the effort is likely to succeed,
- c. The United States has first determined that risk of war in the near future and for the Berlin cause is acceptable, and
- d. All possible time shall first have been gained and used for adequate preparation for the attempt to supply by force and for full-out major war action in support thereof if war results.

Based on consideration of all of the foregoing and bearing in mind their assumption that it is United States policy to maintain our position in Berlin, the Joint Chiefs of Staff urge that there be decision now as to our future military course of action regarding Berlin. This decision should take into account the definite possibility that air transport supply might, for reasons beyond our control, prove to be less than adequate, that it cannot in any case be regarded as a permanent solution of the problem, and the very strong probability that to attempt supply by armed convoy not only would be fruitless but would involve major war risk.

If the decision is made that, our occupation troops are to remain there until forced to withdraw by war action and that an attempt will be made to supply Berlin by force if supply can be maintained no other way, then the Joint Chiefs of Staff recommend that:

- (1) All possible time, not only for continuation of effort toward peaceful solution of the problem, but also for preparation for the event of war, be gained by augmentation of the air supply method, and
- (2) Full-out preparations for the early eventuality of war be inaugurated immediately, since there is every indication that even if this is done the available time may be less than needed.

In accordance with a specific recommendation of the Joint Chiefs, I have advised the Secretary of State that plans should be made now for any later attempt to supply Berlin by composite armed convoy (British, French, and United States).

/s/

James Forrestal

