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A REPORT  
TO THE  
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

by

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

on

POSSIBLE U. S. COURSES OF ACTION IN THE EVENT  
THE USSR REIMPOSES THE BERLIN BLOCKADE

June 1, 1949

WASHINGTON

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Auth: EO 11652  
Date: 7 Apr 1975  
By: Francis G. Davis  
NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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## NOTE BY THE EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

to the

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

POSSIBLE U. S. COURSES OF ACTIONIN THE EVENT THE USSR REIMPOSES THE BERLIN BLOCKADE

References: A. NSC Action No. 215-b  
 B. NSC Action Nos. 84, 109, 129, 131 and 161  
 C. NSC 24 Series

The enclosed report by the Acting Secretary of Defense on the subject, prepared pursuant to NSC Action No. 215-b in coordination with the Department of State, is submitted herewith for consideration by the National Security Council as Item 1 on the agenda for its 41st meeting on Thursday, June 2, 1949.

It is recommended that, if the Council concurs in the enclosed report, it be transmitted to the President with the recommendation that he approve the recommendations in paragraphs 3, 4 and 5 thereof and direct their implementation by all appropriate executive departments and agencies of the U. S. Government under the coordination of the Secretary of State.

It is requested that the enclosed report be handled with extraordinary security precautions.

SIDNEY W. SOUERS  
 Executive Secretary

## Distribution:

The President  
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REPORT TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

on

POSSIBLE U. S. COURSES OF ACTION  
IN THE EVENT THE USSR REIMPOSES THE BERLIN BLOCKADE

1. This report is submitted in accordance with the Council's direction of May 17, 1949 (NSC Action No. 215-b). It has been prepared in conjunction with the Department of State, which concurs in it.

2. Alternative U. S. courses of action have been studied, based upon the views of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, attached as Appendix "A".

3. It is recommended, in the event that the U.S.S.R. reimposes the blockade of Berlin, that:

- a. The airlift be continued at full operational capacity.
- b. The counter-blockade be reimposed.
- c. No attempt be made to establish a land supply route to Berlin by the use of armed motor convoys or otherwise.

d. No attempt to "probe" the blockade to determine Soviet intentions be made. This is considered to be impracticable, to risk a serious loss of prestige and involvement in hostilities.

4. As interim measures, while the Council of Foreign Ministers is in session and thereafter unless a clear written agreement is reached providing definitive arrangements for adequate rail, road and water access to Berlin, it is recommended that:

- a. All efforts, including the airlift, be made to

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increase the reserve stocks of supplies in Berlin.

b. The airlift system be kept in a state of readiness for full operation.

c. All measures requisite for the reinstatement of the counter-blockade be kept in readiness.

5. If a satisfactory agreement for access to Berlin is not reached at the Council of Foreign Ministers, it is recommended that the Soviets be informed that any reimposition of the blockade of Berlin will be considered to be a matter of the gravest concern to the United States; further, that the United Kingdom and France be urged to join in a similar warning.

Incl.  
Appendix "A".

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APPENDIX A

STUDY ON THE POSSIBLE UNITED STATES COURSES OF ACTION  
IN THE EVENT THE USSR REIMPOSES THE BERLIN BLOCKADE

1. In considering the possible United States courses of action in the event the USSR reimposes the Berlin blockade, the Joint Chiefs of Staff have necessarily taken account of the fact that conditions attending the assumed reimposition of the Berlin blockade cannot be accurately known in advance. Since it is manifest that the seriousness of disagreement at the Council of Foreign Ministers prior to reimposition of the blockade, can only be conjectured, conclusions and recommendations contained herein should be subject to later re-examination based on all of the circumstances during at the conclusion of the meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers and on such indications as there may then be as to the probable motives and intentions of the USSR in reimposing the blockade.

2. If the Council of Foreign Ministers fails to reach agreement, and the Soviets reimpose the Berlin blockade, it follows that their decision to take this step would have very serious implications. It is, therefore, essential from the standpoint of national security to give full consideration to these implications. Thus we should not assume that the next blockade would be intended only to resume the same nuisance position as has existed for the last months. We should realize, rather, that the new blockade may be more severe and that its basis might be a determination to force out of Berlin by taking any steps necessary to make the airlift abortive or, perhaps, to bring about a major war issue.

3. If the Soviets do have in mind, in resuming the Berlin blockade, the creation of a really critical major issue, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe that they would hope to cause the situation to develop in such a manner as to place upon the United States responsibility for the initiation of any actual hostilities. If this is the case, then our continuation of the airlift would imply that responsibility upon the Soviets. On the other hand, our resorting to steps involving force would risk our falling in with the plans.

4. While the Joint Chiefs of Staff are aware that the diplomatic field is not within their purview, the possible implications of the reimposition of the Berlin blockade are so serious and potentially far-reaching that they believe that every practicable effort should be made to forestall such a situation. One approach might be to formalize at the Council of Foreign Ministers our request for access to Berlin. It might be said that this would not be

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trying because such formalization will not be needed if the Council of Foreign Ministers reaches satisfactory over-all conclusions while, if not, the effort would naturally fail. It may, nevertheless, be worth undertaking if handled as a point at issue in the early sessions and, in any case, to probe diplomatically the Soviet intentions. It might also be worth-while, if there are indications that the Soviets intend to resume the blockade, to take strong prior diplomatic action, extending even, if attendant circumstances warrant, to a warning that blockade resumption would be considered an unfriendly act.

5. Returning, however, to the basic assumption that the Soviets have reimposed the Berlin blockade, the Joint Chiefs of Staff strongly recommend that the airlift be continued or, if at that time it has been discontinued, that it be resumed and that our own blockade be reimposed. (Present plans call for continuation of the Berlin airlift until stockpiles in Berlin reach the level of 1 March 1948. The present airlift should not be discontinued unless and until there is satisfactory indication that possibility of blockade resumption is remote.) The airlift is neither a sole nor a final action with respect to solution of a new Berlin blockade problem. It is, however, an essential immediate step and, in fact, it is the only practicable step short of great risk of hostilities or decision to leave Berlin.

6. There is now no question as to the practicability of the airlift provided Soviet action does not seriously interfere. The Acting Secretary of the Army's study for the Secretary of Defense, dated 18 May 1949, on the "Support of Berlin Throughout Indefinite Period of Blockade" concludes essentially that the Berlin airlift can be continued indefinitely provided that adequate funds are made available upon request. The study further concludes that the cost will be high and that the "Military Implications Involved in Continuing and Augmenting the Operation of the Airlift" will become more pronounced in proportion to the additional concentration of effort towards maintenance of our position in Berlin. Airlift, however, is the best solution of the problem as long as airlift remains practicable.

7. An alternative solution, not recommended, might be to attempt to establish a land supply route by the use of armed motor convoys. This was thoroughly considered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff shortly after the Berlin blockade was first imposed and the conclusion then reached is still considered sound, that such an attempt would be fraught with the gravest military implications, including the risk of war, and would probably prove ineffective even if faced only with passive interference.

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8. The Joint Chiefs of Staff at that time further concluded that to attempt to supply Berlin by force would be justifiable only if:

- a. Every other solution had first failed or been discarded;
- b. Current evaluation indicated that the effort would be likely to succeed;
- c. The United States had first determined that risk of war in the near future and for the Berlin cause was acceptable; and
- d. All possible time had first 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 resulted.

9. In view of the implications as to Soviet determination and intentions implicit in a reimposition of the Berlin blockade, the conclusions in paragraphs 7 and 8 above are believed to be even more valid now than when they were first reached. In simplest terms it cannot, from the military viewpoint, be justifiable to place dependence on any assumption that the Soviets in resuming the Berlin blockade would merely be bluffing. Further, even a bluff should be called only if we are prepared for a showdown.

10. With reference to alternative number three as contained in DELSEC 1784 of 22 May 1949, the Joint Chiefs of Staff believe there would be nothing gained by such a plan. In the first place any re-institution of the Berlin blockade would now in the view of the Joint Chiefs of Staff be dangerously close to an act of war, and, if the "probing" were then to follow there would be likelihood that the incidence of the war would be laid at the door of the United States. Consequently, they believe that by so-called "probing" much would be risked extending from serious loss of prestige to the distinct possibility of involvement in hostilities even though they assume that the plan is not intended to include the use of force. If it is intended to involve even minor use of force, their comments in paragraphs 7, 8 and 9 above regarding the armed convoy proposal are fully applicable. Otherwise, probing could be expected to prove only the already known fact that the Soviets had reimposed the blockade. A demonstration of Soviet intentions would thus not be accomplished, while our prestige would suffer and needless risk of minor incidents, susceptible of development into actual hostilities, would be the only result.

11. The only other possible alternative, if the Berlin blockade is reimposed, would be to yield our position there. Based on present circumstances and future probabilities, the Joint Chiefs of

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Staff do not now recommend such a step. The National Security Council on 22 July 1948, reiterated the determination of the United States to remain in Berlin in any event.\* Developments since that date have fully justified this determination. If, however, it becomes evident that the supply of Berlin can only be continued by the use of force, serious consideration should then be given as to whether to risk war by resort to force or whether to evacuate U. S. forces from Berlin. At such time the effects of evacuating Berlin should be carefully reconsidered in the light of the adverse military situation. The improvement which a withdrawal from Berlin would make in our immediate military position is obvious, but there is no assurance that the effects of such a move in reducing the threat of war would be lasting.

12. The overriding point that becomes manifest from consideration of the foregoing study as a whole is that blockade reimposition would raise anew, and perhaps more forcibly, all the military questions with respect to war imminence and war readiness that arose with the first blockade. In summary, the Joint Chiefs of Staff consider that in the event the Soviets reimpose the blockade of Berlin the airlift should be reinstated or continued. Further serious consideration should be given at that time to the application of additional economic sanctions, over and above the counterblockade, and the taking of the strongest diplomatic action.