CABINET 73 (50)

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W. 1, on Monday, 13th November, 1950, at 11 a.m.

Present:
The Right Hon. C. R. ATTLEE, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair)
The Right Hon. HERBERT MORRISON, M.P., Lord President of the Council.
The Right Hon. H. T. N. GAITSKELL, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.
The Right Hon. VISCOUNT ADDISON, Lord Privy Seal.
The Right Hon. J. CHUTER EDE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department.
The Right Hon. G. A. ISAACS, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
The Right Hon. T. WILLIAMS, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.
The Right Hon. J. H. WILSON, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.
The Right Hon. P. C. GORDON-WALKER, M.P., Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.
The Right Hon. E. SHINWELL, M.P., Minister of Health.
The Right Hon. GEORGE TOMLINSON, M.P., Minister of Education.
The Right Hon. HECTOR MCNEIL, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. JOHN DUGDALE, M.P., Minister of State for Colonial Affairs (Items 1-2).
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir JOHN SLESSOR, Chief of the Air Staff (Item 2).
Lieutenant-General N. C. D. BROWN-JOHN, Vice-Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Item 2).

Secretariat:
Sir NORMAN BROOK.
Air Marshal Sir WILLIAM ELIOT.
Mr. A. JOHNSTON.
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1. The Foreign Secretary said that he had to answer a Parliamentary Question later in the day asking whether the Government proposed to resume full diplomatic relations with Spain. The Cabinet had suggested on 9th November that the appointment of a United Kingdom Ambassador should be delayed until other Ambassadors had been appointed to Spain. If he were to give full effect to this suggestion he would have to qualify his reply to the Question, and he was doubtful whether it would be wise to give this appearance of reluctance to accept the resolution of the United Nations Assembly about Spain.

The Cabinet agreed that it would be undesirable to imply that there would be delay in giving effect to the United Nations decision. They also asked that other Commonwealth Governments should be kept informed of our intentions in this matter.

The Cabinet—

Agreed that, in announcing the Government’s decision, the Foreign Secretary should not imply that there would be delay in giving effect to the Resolutions of the United Nations Assembly about Spain.

2. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Foreign Secretary (C.P. (50) 267) on Chinese intervention in Korea, and a joint memorandum by the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor of the Exchequer (C.P. (50) 268) on the contribution to be made by the United Kingdom towards the United Nations Fund for reconstruction in Korea.

The Foreign Secretary said that from the outset he had done his utmost to prevent Chinese intervention in Korea, for he had recognised that this would bring with it a grave risk of general war in the Far East. Now that the Chinese intervention had been reported to the Security Council, his object was to secure that the United Nations should not take any action which might extend the area of the conflict. The present situation was critical; and the peace of the Far East turned largely on the handling of the discussions in the Security Council over the next few days. In the light of experience he felt no confidence in India’s influence as a mediator with the Communist Government of China.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that the Chinese, though they had large forces in Manchuria, had not yet deployed very substantial numbers of troops in Korea. Elements of five Chinese armies had been identified in Korea; and the United States authorities estimated that about 35,000 Chinese troops were operating there. Russian types of fighter aircraft were now being encountered in larger numbers, but it seemed likely that these were being piloted by Chinese or North Koreans; and, unless Russian pilots were used, there seemed no immediate risk that the United Nations forces would lose their commanding superiority in the air. So long as they held this, they would have a reasonable chance of withstanding even a major offensive by Chinese forces.

The Chiefs of Staff Committee were, however, of the opinion that it was no longer practicable, without risking a major war, to attain the original objective of occupying the whole of North Korea and placing it under a United Nations régime. They were doubtful whether the United Nations forces could reach the northern frontier without making air attacks on targets in Manchuria; and, even if the frontier could be reached, it would be a difficult task to hold it along a line of about 450 miles in mountainous country. Korea was of no strategic importance to the democratic Powers; and further operations there should now be conducted with a view to preventing any extension of the conflict and avoiding any lasting commitment in this area.
With this in view the Chiefs of Staff Committee favoured the withdrawal of United Nations forces to a shorter line across the neck of the country, running from Chongju to Tokchon, roughly along the 40th Parallel. In addition to being a much shorter line to defend, this would have the great advantage of leaving a buffer area to the north, on the Korean side of the Manchurian frontier, in which military targets could be attacked from the air without the grave international risks involved in making air attacks on targets within Manchuria. It might be possible to declare this buffer area to be a demilitarised zone, with the reservation that any offensive concentration of Chinese or North Korean troops within that area would be liable to air attack. A cease-fire might be arranged on the basis of that line, pending the result of discussions in the Security Council. Meanwhile, United Nations forces would be free to clear up the guerrilla activities to the south.

The Foreign Secretary said that this proposal, which was put forward by the Chiefs of Staff on military grounds, was in accord with his political objectives. He was anxious to prevent the United States Government from being led by their military advisers into policies which would provoke further intervention by China. He was also anxious to do everything he could to allay the reasonable fears of the Chinese lest the Western Powers should occupy large areas of Asian territory under a plea of military necessity. It would be reassuring to public opinion throughout Asia if it could be made clear that United Nations forces were not offering any threat to China. The moment was ripe for putting forward in the Security Council a comprehensive solution of the Korean problem; and he would like to have the Cabinet’s authority to seek agreement on the basis of a buffer area on the lines suggested by the Chiefs of Staff Committee. It would help him in securing such an agreement if he could take a rather more forthcoming attitude towards the amount of the contribution to be made by the United Kingdom towards the fund for reconstruction in Korea.

In the Cabinet’s discussion there was general support for this line of policy, which would enable both the Americans and the Chinese to modify their present attitude without loss of prestige and also held the promise that a larger proportion of the further expenditure of the United Nations in Korea might be directed towards reconstruction rather than hostilities.

In the discussion the following specific points were made:

(a) The proposed buffer area should be wholly within North Korea. There were some indications that the political authorities in the United States might be thinking in terms of a buffer area including some part of Manchuria; and the Cabinet were not disposed to support such a proposal.

(b) Who would be responsible for administering this buffer area? Would it be possible to arrange that, at an early stage, the Chinese should be associated with its administration?

The Foreign Secretary said that he would like further time to consider this aspect of the problem.

(c) His Majesty’s representative in Peking had been instructed to explain orally to British nationals that it would be advisable for those who were able to do so to make arrangements to leave China. Might this not give the impression that we were contemplating action which would give rise to hostilities between this country and China?

The Foreign Secretary said that the evacuation of British women and children from China was to be undertaken unobtrusively. Even if it came to notice, he doubted whether it would influence the policy of the Chinese Government. And in any event he thought it unfair, both to British nationals and to the British authorities in China, to accept the risk of taking no steps to remove the women and children before the situation deteriorated still further.
(d) The proposal to create a buffer area to the north of the 40th Parallel should give rise to no legal difficulties.

(e) Before this policy was put forward in the Security Council, we should seek support for it from the United States Government and the Governments of other Commonwealth countries. The first step would be to approach the political and military authorities in Washington.

The Cabinet next considered, in the light of the discussion recorded above, what contribution the United Kingdom Government might make towards the United Nations fund for reconstruction in Korea. In C.P. (50) 268 it had been proposed that the Minister of State should in the first instance offer a contribution of £5 million and should be authorised, if pressed, to increase this to a maximum of £10 million, provided that this could be presented as no more than our proportionate share of a United Nations programme. The Cabinet were informed that, since this memorandum was circulated, the United States Ambassador had strongly urged that our offer should not be limited to our proportionate share. He had indicated that the United States Government were likely to offer to contribute 65 per cent. of the total cost; and he had expressed the hope that the United Kingdom Government would also come forward with a generous offer.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he did not think it reasonable that the United Kingdom contribution should exceed our proportionate share of a United Nations fund in the same ratio as the offer which was likely to be made by the United States Government. Moreover, as the United States and Commonwealth countries had borne almost the whole of the financial burden of the military operations in Korea, it was important that other members of the United Nations should make a substantial contribution towards the reconstruction fund. If, however, a forthcoming attitude on this point would assist in securing agreement to the general policy which we were about to propose for securing a settlement in Korea, then, subject to the two points which he had mentioned, he would be prepared to agree that the Minister of State should be authorised to offer, in negotiation, to increase our contribution up to a maximum of £12 million.

In discussion the point was made that much of the reconstruction required resulted from damage done in the course of military operations by the United Nations forces. On similar occasions in the future, it might be advisable on this account to ask military commanders to take special steps to ensure that such operations did not involve any more damage than was strictly necessary for military purposes.

The Cabinet were informed that the question of Formosa was likely to come up for discussion in the Security Council in the near future; and that representatives of the Chinese Communist Government were expected to attend for the purpose of expressing their views on this question. The Cabinet would wish to have an opportunity of considering the line which was to be taken by the United Kingdom representative in these discussions on the Security Council.

The Cabinet—

(1) Invited the Foreign Secretary, in consultation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of Defence, to arrange for the immediate despatch of a telegram to His Majesty’s Ambassador in Washington inviting him to ascertain whether the United States Government would be ready to support an attempt to secure a comprehensive settlement of the Korean question along the lines indicated in the Cabinet’s discussion. Similar instructions should at the same time be sent to the Chairman of the British Joint
Staff Mission so that a simultaneous approach could be made to both the military and the political authorities in Washington. The telegram should be repeated, for information, to the United Kingdom representative on the Security Council.

(2) Invited the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations to inform the other Commonwealth Governments of the approach which was to be made to the United States Government, and to seek their support for the general line of policy which was being proposed.

(3) Invited the Foreign Secretary to inform the Minister of State that, in negotiating the amount of the United Kingdom contribution towards the United Nations fund for reconstruction in Korea, against the background of the general policy mentioned in Conclusion (1) above, he had authority in the last resort to offer a contribution of £12 million, if he was satisfied that other members of the United Nations were ready to make a reasonable contribution to the fund.

(4) Invited the Foreign Secretary to submit at an early date a memorandum on the line to be taken, on behalf of the United Kingdom Government, in the forthcoming discussions in the Security Council on the question of Formosa.

3. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Foreign Secretary (C.P. (50) 266) outlining the discussions which had taken place with the United States and French Governments about the proposal of the Soviet Government for four-Power discussions on Germany, and setting out the draft of a public statement which he wished to make in the House of Commons.

The Foreign Secretary said that he was working towards the convening of a meeting of deputies to arrange the agenda for a meeting of the four Foreign Ministers. Unless agreement could be secured beforehand to a comprehensive agenda, a meeting of Foreign Ministers would be used by the Soviet Government for propaganda purposes and would produce no useful result. A meeting of deputies would afford an opportunity of determining whether the Soviet Government were genuinely anxious to discuss all the main outstanding questions which were causing friction and ill-will between East and West. Meanwhile, he wished to give a broad indication of the attitude of the United Kingdom Government to the Soviet approach, in line with public statements which had already been made on behalf of the Governments of the United States and France.

In discussion the following points were made:

(a) The United Kingdom Government wished to explore every practicable means of ending the state of tension between Russia and the democratic countries and, if it was clear that the Soviet Government genuinely desired a conference for the purpose of seeking a solution of all outstanding difficulties, this country would gladly co-operate. The draft statement might with advantage place more emphasis on this fact. The passage indicating that the Government would welcome an opportunity to bring the present international tension to an end through negotiation should therefore precede the passage rejecting the present initiative by the Soviet Government.

(b) It was necessary to indicate without qualification that the Prague communiqué afforded no basis for discussion, since any qualified suggestion that it did afford a basis for a meeting of Foreign Ministers would be used by the Soviet Government as justifying insistence that the discussion at the meeting should turn wholly on the proposals in the Prague communiqué.
(c) It was suggested that the Governments of the United States, France and this country should at some stage issue a statement expressing the fervent wish of the Western world for a peaceful settlement of present difficulties, and indicating that these difficulties had been created by the Soviet Government and could be removed by them. A joint statement of this kind, which asked the Soviet bloc to co-operate in securing world peace and set out without rancour the causes of the existing state of tension and the desire of the Western democracies to see it ended, might do much to deprive the Soviet Government of their propaganda initiative. The timing of any such joint statement would require consideration in relation to the contemplated meeting of Foreign Ministers.

The Cabinet—

Authorised the Foreign Secretary to make in the House of Commons that day a statement regarding the Soviet proposal for a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, on the lines set out in Annex B of C.P. (50) 266 subject to recasting designed to meet the points raised in the Cabinet's discussion.

4. The Home Secretary said that he was to answer that afternoon a Private Notice Question about the circumstances in which a number of foreign delegates to the World Peace Congress at Sheffield had been refused admission to this country. He proposed, in reply, to make it clear that applications for entry had been considered on their merits. As regards admission of persons requiring visas for travel to this country, he would indicate that 573 applications for visas had been made and 301 granted, but that only 88 persons to whom visas had been granted had presented themselves at United Kingdom ports and that 75 had been given leave to land. As regards foreigners not requiring visas, 122 had been given leave to land and 106 refused.

In discussion, it was suggested that the proposed answer should contain a clear indication that the Home Secretary had acted on generally accepted principles in deciding who should be admitted and who should be excluded, and had not endeavoured by an arbitrary use of his powers to deny free speech and the right to hold public meetings. He should make it clear that the application of each alien was considered separately in the light of such information as the Government possessed about his past and present activities and the closeness of his relationship to the Cominform.

The Cabinet—

Invited the Home Secretary, in reply to the Private Notice Question which was to be put to him later that day about the admission of foreigners travelling to the Sheffield Peace Congress, to cover the points suggested in the Cabinet's discussion.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
13th November, 1950.