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C.C. (54)
29th Conclusions

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CABINET

CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Thursday, 15th April, 1954, at 11.30 a.m.

Present:

- The Right Hon. Sir WINSTON CHURCHILL, M.P., Prime Minister.
- The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.
- The Right Hon. LORD SIMONDS, Lord Chancellor.
- The Right Hon. VISCOUNT WOOLTON, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister of Materials.
- The Right Hon. the EARL ALEXANDER OF TUNIS, Minister of Defence.
- The Right Hon. OLIVER LYTTELTON, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.
- The Right Hon. Sir WALTER MONCKTON, Q.C., M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.
- The Right Hon. PETER THORNEYCROFT, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.
- The Right Hon. GWILYM LLOYD-GEORGE, M.P., Minister of Food.
- The Most Hon. the MARQUESS OF SALISBURY, Lord President of the Council.
- The Right Hon. Sir DAVID MAXWELL FYFE, Q.C., M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Welsh Affairs.
- The Right Hon. H. F. C. CROOKSHANK, M.P., Lord Privy Seal.
- The Right Hon. VISCOUNT SWINTON, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations.
- The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.
- The Right Hon. HAROLD MACMILLAN, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government.
- The Right Hon. FLORENCE HORSBRUGH, M.P., Minister of Education.

The following were also present:

- The Right Hon. J. P. L. THOMAS, M.P., First Lord of the Admiralty (*Items 1-2*).
- The Right Hon. LORD DE L'ISLE AND DUDLEY, Secretary of State for Air (*Items 1-2*).
- The Right Hon. JOHN BOYD-CARPENTER, M.P., Financial Secretary, Treasury.
- Mr. G. R. H. NUGENT, M.P., Joint Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries (*Item 4*).
- Vice-Admiral W. W. DAVIS, Vice-Chief of Naval Staff, (*Items 1-2*).
- The Right Hon. ANTHONY HEAD, M.P., Secretary of State for War (*Items 1-2*).
- The Right Hon. Sir DAVID ECCLES, M.P., Minister of Works (*Item 3*).
- Mr. R. MAUDLING, M.P., Economic Secretary, Treasury (*Item 4*).
- Field-Marshal Sir JOHN HARDING, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (*Items 1-2*).
- Air Chief Marshal Sir RONALD IVELAW-CHAPMAN, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff (*Items 1-2*).

Secretariat:

- The Right Hon. Sir NORMAN BROOK.
- Mr. G. MALLABY.
- Mr. R. M. J. HARRIS.

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Hong Kong.
Reduction of
Garrison.
(Previous
Reference:
C.C. (53) 54th
Conclusions,
Minute 1.)

1. *The Foreign Secretary* drew attention to the decision taken by the Defence Committee, at their meeting on the previous day, that after the end of the Geneva Conference the Hong Kong garrison should be reduced by gradual and unobtrusive stages to the level required for internal security purposes. If this decision became known to the United States authorities, it would prejudice the prospects of establishing a system of collective defence in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. And if the Chinese got to know of it, negotiation at Geneva would be made even more difficult. He hoped, therefore, that nothing would be said to indicate to the Governor of Hong Kong, or to the military commanders in the Far East, that a decision had already been taken to reduce the garrison after the Geneva Conference.

The Prime Minister agreed that the decision taken by the Defence Committee must be kept most secret. For the time being the Governor of Hong Kong should be told that no action was being taken on the proposal to reduce the garrison and that the matter would be reviewed after the Geneva Conference. In the meantime, no hint of any kind should be given that a reduction of the garrison was contemplated.

The Cabinet—

Invited the Colonial Secretary to inform the Governor of Hong Kong that no immediate action would be taken to reduce the garrison, that the matter would be reviewed after the Geneva Conference, and that in the meantime no hint should be given that any reduction was contemplated.

Egypt.
(Previous
Reference:
C.C. (54) 21st
Conclusions,
Minute 2.)
Protection of
the British
Community.

2. The Cabinet had before them memoranda by the Chiefs of Staff (D. (54) 19) and the Foreign Secretary (C. (54) 148) on the military arrangements for safeguarding British civilians in Egypt in an emergency.

The Foreign Secretary said that the Chiefs of Staff were now suggesting that we should be content with plans for (i) sending a strong flying column to bring out from Cairo such British subjects as could assemble within the Embassy precincts in an emergency, and (ii) sending warships into Alexandria. He could not think that these plans were adequate. Provisions ought also to be made for a more powerful follow-up operation, which would preserve British and foreign lives and property in Cairo and Alexandria by restoring order in these cities. If a situation arose which called for intervention by us, we might have an opportunity to set up an alternative Government and we should be ill-advised to miss such an opportunity. The Egyptians already knew that we had plans for occupying the Delta, and this knowledge was a powerful guarantee of their good behaviour. If we now restricted our plans in the way proposed by the Chiefs of Staff, we should be abandoning this useful negotiating card. He felt that, so long as we retained forces in the Canal Zone, we ought to be ready to intervene effectively in the Delta if the situation demanded it.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that the object of the modified plan was to enable a start to be made with the re-deployment of the fighting troops in the Canal Zone. So long as we accepted a firm commitment to occupy the Delta in an emergency, no reduction could be made in the garrison of the Canal Zone. Moreover, if we had to restore order in Cairo and Alexandria and support an alternative Government, it was likely that reinforcements would be needed from the United Kingdom.

In discussion the following points were made:—

(a) It was impossible to forecast the scope and nature of the operations which might be required if we had to intervene in the Delta.

It would therefore be wise to have a number of alternative plans to meet the various contingencies that might arise. The choice of any particular plan could not be made in advance.

(b) If plans had to be based on the assumption that all troops now in the Canal Zone would be available for these operations there could be no preliminary reductions and no contraction of the Base, since the reduction of forces and the contraction of the Base were complementary moves which had to proceed simultaneously.

(c) On the other hand, it was suggested that plans for intervention in the Delta should be related to the troops available in the Canal Zone at any given time in accordance with the plans for contracting the Base.

The Prime Minister said that at all stages we must be ready to intervene in the Delta as effectively as we could with the forces available in the Canal Zone. This did not mean that plans for the contraction of the Base should not be made, although no forces should be withdrawn from the Canal Zone without further reference to the Cabinet. The Chiefs of Staff should prepare plans for intervention in the Delta on varying assumptions regarding the local situation and the forces available in the Canal Zone at the various stages of re-deployment.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Instructed the Chiefs of Staff to prepare plans for intervention in the Delta with the forces at any time available in the Canal Zone, on the lines indicated by the Prime Minister.
- (2) Agreed that plans for the contraction of the Canal Zone Base and the reduction of forces should continue to be made, but should not be put into effect without further reference to the Cabinet.

Defence
Negotiations.

The Prime Minister said that the readiness of the United States Government to join in an Anglo-American initiative for the establishment of a system of collective defence for South-East Asia and the Western Pacific had encouraged him to hope that they might now be ready to join with us in similar assurances about the security of the Middle East and the Suez Canal. If the Egyptians were confronted with a firm Anglo-American declaration on the requirements for security in that area, we should have a good prospect of reaching a satisfactory agreement which would enable us to reduce our forces without loss of prestige. We should not need to ask the Americans to provide either forces or money. An international agreement, in which the British and the Americans took the lead, would be a sufficient guarantee of the security of the area and of the right of international passage through the Suez Canal, and no great show of force should be required. He thought that the moment was opportune for suggesting a scheme of this kind to the Americans.

The Foreign Secretary said that it was not easy to create a system of collective defence in the Middle East. In South-East Asia there were a number of large and small Powers directly involved by territorial and other interests. The countries of the Middle East were less willing to be drawn into a collective defence pact. Moreover, the Americans had so far taken the line that they would take no part in defence negotiations or arrangements with Egypt unless the Egyptians invited them to do so. He would, however, examine the possibility of devising some workable scheme which he might have an opportunity of discussing with the United States Secretary of State during the Geneva Conference.

The Cabinet—

- (3) Took note that the Foreign Secretary would examine the possibility of putting forward practical proposals for a system of collective defence in the Middle East.

Civil Defence.
(Previous
Reference:
C.C. (53) 48th
Conclusions,
Minute 7.)
Re-statement
of policy.

3. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C. (54) 149) covering an outline of a speech on civil defence which he was proposing to make at Bristol on 23rd April.

The Home Secretary said that this was an opportune moment to re-state the need for civil defence measures. There was widespread public anxiety about the effects of the hydrogen bomb. The Coventry City Council had declared their intention to abandon their civil defence preparations. Some newspapers were suggesting that the Government's policy and plans were inadequate to the new dangers threatened by the development of the hydrogen bomb. There was clear need therefore for an authoritative statement that, though the rôle of the civil defence services might be altered by the development of the hydrogen bomb, the need for them remained. The outline of his proposed statement had been considered by the Civil Defence Committee, but in view of its importance he had thought it right to give the Cabinet an opportunity to comment on what he proposed to say.

In discussion the following points were made:—

(a) There was general agreement on the importance of checking any tendency to assume that no civil defence measures would be of any value against attack by hydrogen bombs. While no structural precautions could provide protection against a direct hit by a hydrogen bomb, civil defence measures would still be important at the periphery of such an explosion.

(b) Dispersal would now become more important than shelter, and further thought should be given to means of improving the road outlets from target areas.

(c) The reference in paragraph 16 of the draft to the employment of 100,000 R.A.F. reservists in civil defence might be misunderstood unless it were made clear that they would be employed on these duties only until they were needed in the Air Force.

(d) Paragraphs 6 and 7 of the draft might give the impression that the Government's first objective was to prevent the use of the hydrogen bomb in war. There was, however, an earlier stage in the development of this argument, viz., the Government's primary aim of preserving world peace by removing the causes of war.

The Cabinet—

(1) Approved the general lines of the draft annexed to C. (54) 149; and took note that the Home Secretary, in preparing the final version of his speech, would take into account the points raised in the Cabinet's discussion.

Shelter Policy.

The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Minister of Works (C. (54) 150) pointing out that, in view of the recent disclosure of the explosive power of the hydrogen bomb, he would have much greater difficulty in carrying out the existing policy that persons erecting buildings of four or more storeys should be persuaded to include in them a strengthened basement adequate for use as an air-raid shelter.

The Minister of Works said that, although he had hitherto had some success in persuading developers to include strengthened basements in such buildings, there would clearly be much greater reluctance to incur this additional expenditure now that the explosive power of the hydrogen bomb was known. If any substantial provision of strengthened basements was to be made, it would be necessary to use compulsory powers and to provide a Government grant in respect of the additional expenditure incurred.

In discussion it was agreed that this policy should not be enforced by compulsory powers. It need not, however, be wholly abandoned—for strengthened basements would still afford valuable protection outside the immediate area of a hydrogen bomb explosion.

The Minister should therefore continue to try to persuade developers voluntarily to include strengthened basements in such buildings; but, when persuasion failed, he should not on that account refuse a building licence. He should, if possible, avoid any public indication that there had been any change of Government policy in this matter.

The Cabinet—

- (2) Agreed that the Minister of Works should continue to try to persuade developers to include strengthened basements in buildings of four storeys or more, but should not press this policy to the point of refusing a building licence to developers who were unwilling to incur the additional expense of providing a strengthened basement in such a building.

Commercial Policy.
 Review of G.A.T.T. (Previous Reference: C.C. (53) 61st Conclusions, Minute 6.)

4. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the President of the Board of Trade (C. (54) 144) proposing the appointment of a Ministerial Committee and an inter-departmental Committee of officials to consider the line to be taken on behalf of the United Kingdom Government in the forthcoming review of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (G.A.T.T.).

The President of the Board of Trade said that the international review of the G.A.T.T. was likely to start in November. At the Meeting of Commonwealth Finance Ministers at Sydney it had been agreed that this should be preceded by discussions between officials of Commonwealth countries, and this Commonwealth meeting was likely to be held early in October. It was important that at this meeting the United Kingdom Delegation should be in a position to give a clear lead to the other Commonwealth countries. The issues involved were complex and far-reaching, and it would take some time to reach agreement on the line to be taken on behalf of the United Kingdom Government. He therefore proposed that inter-departmental discussion should begin without delay.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Approved the proposal, in paragraph 8 of C. (54) 144, for the appointment of a Ministerial Committee and an inter-departmental Committee of officials to consider the line to be taken on behalf of the United Kingdom Government in the forthcoming review of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.
- (2) Took note that the Prime Minister would settle the composition of the Ministerial Committee to be appointed under Conclusion (1) above.

Sexual Offences.
 (Previous Reference: C.C. (54) 20th Conclusions, Minute 4.)

5. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary (C. (54) 121) summarising the arguments for and against the suggestion, made in the Cabinet's earlier discussions on 24th February and 17th March, that legislation might be passed to restrict publication of the details of criminal prosecutions for homosexual offences.

The Home Secretary said that in his judgment the objections to such legislation outweighed any advantage it might have. He was specially impressed with the difficulty of drawing a distinction, as regards publication, between homosexual offences and other sexual offences—or, for that matter, crimes of violence, which were often associated with sexual irregularity or misconduct. There was also force in the argument that, if the Government supported this legislation and at the same time declined to hold an enquiry, they would

be open to the criticism that they were trying to suppress the publication of evidence showing the need for an enquiry.

The Home Secretary said that in these circumstances he felt obliged to press his earlier proposal for the holding of an independent enquiry into the law relating to prostitution and homosexual offences. As, however, the Cabinet were reluctant to add to the number of Royal Commissions now sitting, he was ready to agree that this enquiry should be made by a Departmental Committee rather than a Royal Commission.

The Prime Minister said that, if the Home Secretary was prepared to take the responsibility for appointing a Departmental Committee to enquire into these matters, the Cabinet need not raise objection to this modified proposal.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Agreed that a Departmental Committee should be appointed to enquire into the law relating to prostitution and homosexual offences.
- (2) Took note that the Home Secretary would consult with the Prime Minister on the membership of the proposed Committee.

Malta.
(Previous
Reference:
C.C. (53) 52nd
Conclusions,
Minute 2.)

6. The Cabinet had before them a memorandum by the Home Secretary and the Colonial Secretary (C. (54) 141) seeking guidance on the line they should take in forthcoming discussions with Dr. Borg Olivier, the Prime Minister of Malta, about Malta's future status.

The Colonial Secretary said that the offer was still open that Malta should be brought under the authority of the Queen in Council, on the analogy of the Channel Islands and the Isle of Man, with the Home Secretary as the responsible Minister. It seemed likely, however, that the Maltese would be unwilling to accept this offer. The possible alternatives appeared to be:—

- (i) to accede to Dr. Borg Olivier's desire that Malta should be accorded a status comparable with that enjoyed by Southern Rhodesia before Central African federation;
- (ii) to develop a closer relation between Malta and the United Kingdom on the lines favoured by the Labour Party in Malta;
- (iii) to appoint a Royal Commission to examine the working of Malta's present constitution, her financial problems and the question of some change in her present status.

As regards (i), a request that responsibility for handling the affairs of Malta in London should be transferred to the Commonwealth Secretary had already been rejected. The idea of closer integration of Malta with the United Kingdom, implicit in (ii) above, must depend very largely on whether Parliamentary representation of Malta at Westminster could be seriously considered. He himself did not consider that it could and he understood that his view was shared by the Labour Opposition in the House of Commons. The Opposition were also doubtful about the wisdom of any arrangement which might make this country's social services available to the population of Malta, which the island's economy could not wholly support. There were risks in the appointment of a Royal Commission, which might submit recommendations which the Government could not accept. It seemed possible, however, that Ministers might find themselves in a position in which the appointment of a Commission was unavoidable.

In discussion there was general agreement that representation of Malta in the Parliament at Westminster could not be contemplated.

The Commonwealth Secretary said that further reflection had confirmed him in the view that the Cabinet had been right to reject the request that responsibility for handling Malta's affairs should be transferred to him. He was, however, apprehensive about the possible consequences of the appointment of a Royal Commission and he hoped that the two Secretaries of State would find it possible, in their discussions with Dr. Borg Olivier, to explore the position and report further to the Cabinet before a decision was taken to appoint a Royal Commission.

The Prime Minister said that it did not seem necessary at this stage to rule out the possibility that it would eventually be necessary to adopt a negative attitude towards Malta's present attempts to obtain some change in her constitutional status.

The Colonial Secretary pointed out that Malta's claims tended to evoke special sympathy and support in this country on account of her unique position in having been awarded the George Cross.

The Cabinet—

- (1) Took note of C. (54) 141 and of the views expressed in discussion.
- (2) Authorised the Home Secretary and the Colonial Secretary to initiate discussions with the Prime Minister of Malta and invited them to refer the matter again to the Cabinet before bringing these discussions to a conclusion.

Malaya.
Constitutional
Change in
Singapore.
(Previous
Reference:
C.C. (54) 23rd
Conclusions,
Minute 5.)

7. The Cabinet considered a memorandum by the Colonial Secretary (C. (54) 142) on the proposed constitutional changes in Singapore.

The Colonial Secretary said that, in pursuance of the recommendations of a Constitutional Commission, he proposed to transfer responsibility in Singapore in all matters except defence, external affairs and internal security from the Governor to elected Ministers responsible to a legislative assembly with a large elected majority. In future the franchise would be restricted, broadly speaking, to "citizens of the United Kingdom and the Colonies" as distinct from "British subjects." One effect of this restriction would be to withdraw the vote from the majority of the nationals of Commonwealth countries other than the United Kingdom and, in particular, from the Indian community. It would, however, be open to individual Indian residents to register as citizens of the United Kingdom and the Colonies and thereby to recover the right to vote, while at the same time incurring all the obligations of citizenship, including liability to military service.

The Commonwealth Secretary said that he recognised the importance of stimulating a sense of local loyalty in Singapore and he would raise no objection in principle to the Colonial Secretary's proposal. The Indian Government would have no valid ground for objecting as they did not at present accord reciprocal rights in India to citizens of the United Kingdom and the Colonies from Singapore. He would, however, welcome an opportunity to consider further the exact effect which the proposed modification of the franchise arrangements would have on the Australian community in Singapore.

The Cabinet—

Approved in principle the proposals for constitutional change in Singapore outlined in C. (54) 142.