CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, S.W. 1, on Wednesday, 12th December, 1956, at 5 p.m.

Present:

The Right Hon. R. A. BUTLER, M.P., Lord Privy Seal (in the Chair).

The Most Hon. The MARQUESS OF SALISBURY, Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. GWILYM LLOYD-GEORGE, M.P., Secretary of State for the Home Department and Minister for Welsh Affairs.

The Right Hon. ALAN LENNOX-BLOYD, M.P., Secretary of State for the Colonies.

The Right Hon. DUNCAN SANDYS, M.P., Minister of Housing and Local Government.

The Right Hon. D. HEATHCOAT AMORY, M.P., Minister of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food.

The Right Hon. IAIN MACLEOD, M.P., Minister of Labour and National Service.

The Right Hon. Viscount KILMUIR, Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon. JAMES STUART, M.P., Secretary of State for Scotland.


The Right Hon. PETER THORNEycroft, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon. Sir DAVID ECCLES, M.P., Minister of Education.

The Right Hon. The Earl of SELKIRK, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster.

The Right Hon. PATRICK BUCHAN-HEPBURN, M.P., Minister of Works.

The following were also present:

The Right Hon. HAROLD WATKINSON, M.P., Minister of Transport and Civil Aviation.

The Right Hon. ALLAN NOBLE, M.P., Minister of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Earl of Gosford, Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Defence.

Dr. The Right Hon. CHARLES HILL, M.P., Postmaster-General.

The Right Hon. EDWARD HEATH, M.P., Parliamentary Secretary, Treasury.

The Hon. G. R. WARD, M.P., Parliamentary and Financial Secretary, Admiralty.

Secretariat:

Mr. B. St. J. TREND.

Mr. H. O. HOOPER.
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1. Parliament
2. Cyprus
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**Withdrawal of Anglo-French Force.**
**Clearance of the Canal.**
**Prisoners of War.**
1. The Cabinet were informed of the business to be taken in the House of Commons in the following week. A debate on the economic situation would be held on 20th December, and it was agreed that the Minister of Labour and the Economic Secretary, Treasury, should be the Government spokesmen.

The House was expected to rise for the Christmas recess on 21st December.

2. The Cabinet had before them a revised draft (C.P. (56) 281) of the proposed statement of policy in regard to constitutional advance in Cyprus.

The Lord Privy Seal said that the Prime Minister, to whom a summary of the statement had been telegraphed, had expressed concern about the reference to partition. He had suggested that, if partition had to be contemplated, it should provide a share of the Island for ourselves as well as for the Greeks and Turks. Meanwhile, the Foreign Secretary had reported from Paris that pressure was mounting to have the problem of Cyprus discussed by the North Atlantic Council. The Foreign Secretary was resisting this; but he thought it would now be to our advantage to make the proposed statement of policy before the Christmas recess. On the other hand the Opposition had intimated that they were concerned to discuss, before the House rose, no more than the recent security regulations which had been introduced in Cyprus, and were not intending to press for a general debate.

The Lord President said that the proposed statement, as revised, made no mention of a plebiscite; and the passage which set out the conditions which must be satisfied before self-determination could be considered had been revised in such a way as to put the prospect of partition into a more accurate perspective. The Foreign Secretary's report reinforced the case for making the statement before the recess. But the prospect of partition, once it had been disclosed, would be liable to dominate discussion thereafter and to exert an undue influence on the future course of events. Partition ought not to be mentioned unless the Government were prepared, however reluctantly, to contemplate it as a reality; and further consideration should be given to the possibility of discussing our intentions with the Greeks and Turks in terms which included no direct reference to partition.

The Colonial Secretary said that a partition of Cyprus into three parts, rather than two, need not be excluded. But the question of partition would not arise until the Island was no longer needed as a base and, when that stage had been reached, a tripartite division would be unnecessary. The prospect of partition as a possible ultimate solution, would, however, give the Turks an effective veto against Enosis; and the Turks would not even acquiesce in our proposals if this possibility were not foreshadowed. It did not follow that partition would become an inevitable solution. The choice of this alternative would not be put to the Cypriot population before they had been invited to remain under British sovereignty; and, with the help of the new constitution, they might well express such a preference.

Meanwhile, the postponement of a statement would not contribute towards a solution of the present problem. The situation in Cyprus would deteriorate, the Government would be held responsible for the further casualties which would undoubtedly occur, and they would be charged with lack of initiative. It would therefore be to our disadvantage to defer a statement until the question of Cyprus was about to be debated in the United Nations. The Government would, moreover, be in an embarrassing position in the debate in Parliament in the following week if, in attempting to defend the exceptionally severe security regulations, they were unable to reveal the existence of any more constructive policy.
For all these reasons he urged that Lord Radcliffe's report and the proposed statement should be published before the Christmas recess, and that consultations with the Greeks and Turks should take place immediately. H.M. Ambassadors in both Greece and Turkey had advised that the prospects of collaboration from both Governments would be increased if he himself were to visit their capitals for these consultations and, with his colleagues' approval, he proposed to leave on the following day. He would accept no definite commitment in regard to partition, and would represent the policy set out in the proposed statement as merely the lines on which the Government were at present thinking.

Further discussion showed that the Cabinet were agreed that the balance of advantage lay in making a statement of policy on the lines proposed before Parliament rose for the recess. On the question of partition it was not possible at present to foresee a time when we should have no strategic interest in Cyprus; and, while it might be theoretically possible to partition the island in such a way that we retained control of no more than a military base, this solution was impracticable in the light of our need to enjoy, in addition, adequate port facilities at Famagusta (which would lie in the Turkish sector) and to maintain an early warning system covering the whole island. Nevertheless, it was now urgently necessary to make a further attempt to resolve the problems of Cyprus, and even the limited collaboration of the Greeks and the Turks, on which the success of our efforts must depend, could not be secured if the prospect of ultimate partition was withheld. It was essential that we should retain the initiative, in view of the risk that we might later appear, if we deferred action now, to have been forced into making an advance as a result of international pressure.

The Cabinet considered whether it was expedient that a Cabinet Minister should visit Greece and Turkey, especially in view of the attitude which Greece had hitherto adopted towards the Cyprus problem. Our proposals might meet with a rebuff, which would be more damaging if they had been presented by a Minister than if discussions had been conducted through diplomatic channels. On the other hand, this opportunity for a settlement might not recur, and both our Ambassadors had strongly advised that the consultations should be conducted by the Colonial Secretary.

It was agreed that copies of Lord Radcliffe's report should be made available, when these consultations were taking place, to the United States Ambassadors in London, Athens and Ankara, to the United States Consul-General in Cyprus, and to the High Commissioners in London of the older Commonwealth countries. It was also agreed that copies of the report should be made available to Opposition leaders during the current week.

The Cabinet—

(1) Agreed in principle, subject to the Prime Minister's later approval and to the outcome of consultations with the Greek and Turkish Governments, that Lord Radcliffe's report on a constitution for Cyprus should be published in the following week, together with a statement of policy on the lines of the draft annexed to C.P. (56) 281.

(2) Authorised the Colonial Secretary to visit Athens and Ankara forthwith for the necessary consultations.

Suez Canal.

(Previous Reference: C.M. (56) 98th Conclusions, Minute 3.) Withdrowal of Anglo-French force.
they had given us their support in the International Monetary Fund. Nevertheless, it appeared impossible to dissuade the French Government from the course which they proposed to follow; and, since it was not practicable for us to differ from them on this point, there was no alternative to accepting 22nd December as the final date for the completion of the withdrawal of the Anglo-French force.

The Cabinet—

(I) Invited the Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Defence, to instruct the Commander-in-Chief of the Allied force that the withdrawal from Port Said should not be completed until 22nd December.

The Lord Privy Seal said that the Foreign Secretary was disturbed by the apparent lack of progress in clearing the Canal and was proposing to send the Secretary-General of the United Nations a telegram reminding him vigorously of the understanding on this subject which we regarded ourselves as having reached with him.

In discussion the following points were made:

(a) The fact that the withdrawal of the Anglo-French force was now to be prolonged by several days might be turned to advantage in this connection.

(b) There were indications that the Secretary-General himself was not satisfied with the attitude of General Wheeler towards the clearance of the Canal; and a firmly worded telegram from the Foreign Secretary might, therefore, reach him at an opportune moment.

(c) General Wheeler was reported to have agreed with the Egyptian Government that clearance of the rest of the Canal would not begin until the withdrawal of the Anglo-French force was complete. If this report was correct, it represented a clear breach of our understanding with the Secretary-General that clearance would proceed as rapidly as was technically possible, without regard to other considerations.

(d) The most reliable estimate which was possible at present suggested that the time required to clear the Canal, if only the resources at the disposal of the United Nations were used, would be approximately double the time required if those resources were supplemented by our own salvage fleet. This point should be put forcefully to the Secretary-General. It was also for consideration whether, in order to accelerate the process of clearance, we should put the crews of our naval vessels in civilian clothes and offer to accept representatives of the United Nations as observers on board these ships as a guarantee of our good faith.

(e) Unless the obstacles in the way of British participation in the further clearance of the Canal could be overcome, we might be compelled to withdraw our salvage vessels and their crews entirely. Alternatively, we should represent to the Secretary-General that, in the light of what appeared to be a breach of our clear understanding with him about the clearance of the Canal, we had no choice but to reconsider our whole policy towards the United Nations.

The Cabinet—

(2) Invited the Minister of State for Foreign Affairs to inform the Foreign Secretary of the points made in their discussion, as material which he might use at his discretion to strengthen the message which he proposed to send to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Defence, said that it was now urgently necessary to decide whether we would hand over our Egyptian prisoners of war to the Commander of the United Nations force or remove them from Egypt, possibly to Cyprus, in order to negotiate their surrender against the release and repatriation of the War Office contractors' staffs now interned in Egypt.
In discussion the following points were made:

(f) We had no legal justification for retaining prisoners of war after hostilities had ceased, and it would be unwise to try to bargain their release against a corresponding release of our own nationals. The Secretary-General of the United Nations was already pressing the Egyptian Government to repatriate the War Office contractors' staffs, and he should be encouraged to maintain this pressure independently of any action on our part as regards our Egyptian prisoners of war.

(g) On the other hand it would not be possible to defend to public opinion in this country an arrangement whereby we surrendered our own prisoners of war, while leaving the War Office contractors' staffs in the hands of the Egyptian Government as a bargaining counter which they would undoubtedly employ in all the various negotiations which lay ahead.

(h) The Governor of Cyprus foresaw considerable difficulty in accommodating Egyptian prisoners of war in Cyprus.

The Cabinet—

(3) Agreed to resume, at their next meeting, consideration of the treatment of our Egyptian prisoners of war.

(4) Invited the Colonial Secretary to investigate further the possibility of transferring the Egyptian prisoners of war to Cyprus, if the Cabinet should decide to retain these prisoners under our control.

Cabinet Office, S.W. 1,
12th December, 1956.