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WAR CABINET, 82.

*Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, on Wednesday,
February 28, 1917, at 11.30 A.M.*

Present :

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

The Right Hon. A. HENDERSON, M.P.

| The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.

*In attendance :*The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M.,
M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign
Affairs (for Minutes 1 to 19).The Right Hon. the EARL OF DERBY, K.G.,
G.C.V.O., C.B., Secretary of State for
War (for Minutes 1 to 18).The Right Hon. the LORD HARDINGE OF
PENSHURST, K.G., G.C.B., G.C.S.I.,
G.C.M.G., G.C.I.E., G.C.V.O., I.S.O.,
Permanent Under-Secretary of State for
Foreign Affairs (for Minutes 1 to 15).General SIR W. R. ROBERTSON, G.C.B.,
K.C.V.O., D.S.O., Chief of the Imperial
General Staff (for Minutes 1 to 15).The Right Hon. the LORD R. CECLIL, K.C.,
M.P., Minister of Blockade (for Minute
19).Admiral SIR J. R. JELlicoe, G.C.B., O.M.,
G.C.V.O., First Sea Lord of the
Admiralty (for Minutes 1 to 9).The Right Hon. SIR A. STANLEY, M.P.,
President of the Board of Trade (for
Minute 19).The Right Hon. SIR J. P. MACLAY, Bart.,
M.P., Shipping Controller (for Minute
19).Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary.*Fleet Paymaster P. H. Row, R.N., *Assistant Secretary.*

General Alexeieff.

1. THE Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that General Alexeieff would resume his position as Chief of the Staff to the Russian Army to-morrow.

Portugal.

2. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that the Portuguese Government had offered a second Division.

The Secretary of State for War reported that he had thanked them, and at the same time informed them that the necessary arrangements would be made.

Western Front :
Capture of
Gommecourt.

3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported the occupation of Gommecourt by the British forces.

Mesopotamia.

4. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff read a telegram from Mesopotamia indicating that the Turkish Army was not only in full retreat, but had suffered heavy losses, including a number of guns and howitzers, which had been thrown into the Tigris, and that the total number of prisoners since the commencement of the present operations in December was 5,300. He stated that the British advanced troops in pursuit were now 30 miles west of Kut.

The First Sea Lord reported that in proceeding to Kut-el-Amara the Tigris steamers had sustained a few hits, but there had only been one casualty.

Instructions to General Maude.

5. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff asked for the instructions of the War Cabinet as to the further orders to be given to the Commander-in-Chief of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff pointed out to the War Cabinet that General Maude's present instructions (War Committee, 71, Appendix), which were approved by the War Committee on the 28th September, 1916, precluded him from an advance to Baghdad (Appendix I). The Chief of the Imperial General Staff asked for instructions—*vide* General Maude's telegram No. 878 (Appendix II)—and mentioned the following factors as affecting the question of a more forward advance being made:—

- (a.) The difficulty of maintaining the force.
- (b.) Baghdad is a difficult place to hold.
- (c.) The questions of Turkish reinforcements and the action of the Russian forces—both of which are at present doubtful.
- (d.) The Government would no doubt like our troops to be at Baghdad before the Russians.
- (e.) The possibility of continuing to find the necessary shipping.

He said that General Maude's communications would probably not be adequate to maintain permanently a sufficient force at Baghdad before the 1st April, but he could, no doubt, continue to push further forward than at present, and he might be able to raid Baghdad, but the Chief of the Imperial General Staff could not say whether and when Baghdad itself could be occupied and safely and effectively held.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that he understood the policy of the British Government to be that, subject to the security of the force and the capacity of the communications, it was desired to establish British influence in the Baghdad vilayet.

The War Cabinet informed the Chief of the Imperial General Staff that he had correctly understood their policy, and directed him to convey instructions in that sense to General Maude, on the understanding that, without departing therefrom, the latter was to exploit the recent operations to the fullest possible extent.

Transports Ashore.

6. The First Sea Lord reported that three transports and a destroyer had gone ashore near Havre owing to fog. Efforts were being made to get them off, and steps had been taken to protect them from submarine attack.

Transports to France.

7. The First Sea Lord reported that the transport of additional Divisions to France could not be completed before the full moon. Unless this transport was very urgent, he strongly recommended its suspension for three days on each side of the full moon.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff undertook to consider the question and to inform the First Sea Lord, the matter being brought before the Cabinet to-morrow, if necessary.

Submarines.

8. The First Sea Lord reported a number of encounters with submarines, in one of which he considered the enemy submarine had been sunk.

Mr. Edison's
Inventions.

9. The First Sea Lord reported that he had made enquiries as to the story that Mr. Edison was dissatisfied with his treatment by the Admiralty in regard to a certain invention, said to relate to the location of submarines. He had ascertained that the invention was only a form of electrical storage battery for use in submarines. These articles were now under trial in the British Navy, and would be reported on in three months' time. There had been considerable delay on the part of Mr. Edison in supplying these articles for trial. The results of the First Sea Lord's enquiries up to date, made at the War Cabinet's request (War Cabinet, 78, Minute 2) as to submarine detectors, were that the Government of the United States of America had no anti-submarine device of this nature. He added that further enquiries were being made by the Admiralty.

Restriction of
Imports:
The French
Attitude.

10. With reference to the representation of the French Government on the subject of the restriction of imports, the Prime Minister stated that he discussed the question yesterday with M. Briand at Calais. M. Briand had made no demur to his explanations of the motives of the British Government in adopting this policy, and had undertaken to explain them to the French Minister of Commerce.

The War Cabinet authorised the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to inform the French Ambassador in this sense.

Tariff Treaty with
Japan.

11. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the War Cabinet that some years ago a treaty had been made between Great Britain and Japan with regard to no preferential tariffs being imposed against certain staple industries of Japan, and that the Japanese Ambassador had drawn his attention to this treaty. To consider this and similar cases prior to rendering a report to the Cabinet, Mr. Balfour asked that a small Committee, composed of the President of the Board of Trade and himself and representatives of their Departments, might be authorised.

The War Cabinet approved this proposal.

Anglo-French
Conference, 26th
and 27th February,
1917:
Responsibility of
the British and
French Com-
manders-in-Chief.

12. The Prime Minister described in detail the discussions at, and the negotiations in connection with, the Anglo-French Conference at Calais on the 26th and 27th February.

The War Cabinet confirmed the signed agreement, approving the plans of the two Commanders-in-Chief, and regulating their respective limits of responsibility during the forthcoming operations on the Western Front (Appendix III).

13. The War Cabinet decided that—

The Secretary of State for War should inform Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig that the arrangement made at the Calais Conference of the 27th instant regarding the relations to exist between him and General Nivelle during the forthcoming operations had for its object merely the securing of a clearly defined unity of control, and one which the French Government understood and definitely accepted. It was in no sense an aspersion on the ability and qualifications of

Sir Douglas Haig, in whom the War Cabinet continue to entertain full confidence.

Liaison Arrangements on the Western Front.

14. The War Cabinet also approved the arrangement entered into by the Prime Minister at the Calais Conference for the appointment of a General Officer of some standing as Head of the British Mission at French General Headquarters, as well as a representative of the Quarter-Master General to the British Expeditionary Force.

They requested the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to report the action taken in this connection.

Salonica :
The Rôle of the Allied Armies.

15. The War Cabinet approved the following decision arrived at by the Calais Conference, defining the scope of the Allied Armies based on Salonica :—

As the co-operation of the Russo-Roumanian forces against Bulgaria is not yet possible, the Conference agrees to confirm the decision of the Rome Conference, and decides that, for the present, the decisive defeat of the Bulgarian Army is not a practical objective, and that the mission of the Allied forces at Salonica is to keep on their front the enemy forces now there, and to take advantage of striking the enemy if opportunity offers.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and the Secretary of State for War were requested to communicate this decision as requisite.

Publication of Irish Courts-Martial.

16. The War Cabinet decided that—

It was contrary to the public interest that the present Government should confirm the statement by the late Prime Minister that the proceedings of the Irish Courts-Martial would be published. Among the reasons leading them to this decision were the present inflammable condition of Ireland; the fact that the witnesses before the Courts-Martial were aware that the proceedings were secret and gave evidence on that distinct understanding; and that if the proceedings were published it was anticipated that there would certainly be great difficulty in obtaining evidence in the future if further trouble arose.

Man-Power :
Issue of Order requiring Employers to keep Registers.

17. The War Cabinet approved the proposed amendment of the Defence of the Realm Regulation 41 (a) (War Cabinet, 78, Minute 8 (b)), subject to the omission of paragraph 1, which would have extended the application of the Order to Ireland.

The Dardanelles Commission.

18. The Secretary reported that the alterations to the Report of the Dardanelles Commission which the Admiralty and War Office considered must, in the public interest, be made before publication, had been received, and he was in touch with the Commission on the subject. He had, however, not yet received the observations of the Foreign Office, who, he understood, were awaiting a reply from the French Government. The War Cabinet decided that—

The Foreign Office should make a representation to the French Government that, unless an immediate communication to

the contrary was received, it would be considered that they had no objection, and the Report of the Dardanelles Commission would be published as soon as possible.

Detention, &c., of
Neutral Shipping
in the United
Kingdom.

19. The Minister of Blockade reported to the War Cabinet the steps that had been taken to induce ships belonging to the Scandinavian countries to resume their trade with the United Kingdom and elsewhere. He pointed out that—

- (a.) As far as Norwegian shipping was concerned, the progress had been satisfactory, but that no Swedish, Danish, or Dutch ships had resumed their sailings.
- (b.) With regard to Denmark, the result was that additional cattle and agricultural produce were being sent to Germany, and, to obviate this, some Danish ships carrying fodder were being released, so that the Danish Government could not advance the plea that the cattle were being exported to Germany because they could not be fed in Denmark, and that arrangements had also been made to send Danish produce to Bergen for transhipment in Norwegian vessels to British ports.

It was stated by Lord Robert Cecil that, by Danish law, no merchant ship belonging to that country could be transferred to another flag without the permission of the Danish Government, and that the Minister had informed him that, if the British Government requisition the ships, it would be necessary for his Government to make a very strong protest on the subject.

The Minister for Blockade stated that the United States Naval War Code, subject to certain arrangements, authorised the seizure of neutral merchant ships in belligerent waters, and that there was no treaty stipulation between ourselves and Denmark that clearly prevented such action on our part.

The War Cabinet decided, having in view the small amount of tonnage involved (28,000 tons), that—

In the first instance, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should see the American Ambassador and ascertain his personal view as to what would be the feeling in the United States if we requisitioned the Danish, Swedish, and Dutch ships now held up in British waters.

(Initialled) D. Ll G

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
February 28, 1917.

APPENDIX I.

EXTRACT FROM PROCEEDINGS OF MEETING OF WAR COMMITTEE HELD ON
SEPTEMBER 28, 1916 (W.C.-71, APPENDIX).

Instructions of His Majesty's Government to the Commander-in-Chief in India as to the Mission of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force, dated September 28, 1916.

THE mission of the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force is to protect the oilfields and pipe lines in the vicinity of the Karun River, to maintain our occupation and control of the Basra vilayet, and to deny hostile access to the Persian Gulf and Southern Persia. No fresh advance to Baghdad can be contemplated at present, but it is the desire of His Majesty's Government, if and when possible, to establish British influence in the Baghdad vilayet. This further advance should not be undertaken unless and until sanction for it is given, but the General Officer Commanding should meanwhile continue to improve the river and railway communications and maintain as forward a position as the state of his communications will allow, and as can be made secure tactically without incurring heavy loss, whether caused by the enemy or by climatic conditions. Military and political considerations connected with Nasiriyeh, the Muntifik, and Bani Lam tribes, and the Pusht-i-Kuh Bakhtiari country suggest retention of our present positions if this can be achieved without undue sacrifices; but we desire your views as to the feasibility of this course. You will doubtless consult Sir Percy Cox as to the effect on the Arabs of any withdrawal. Further, the Mesopotamia Expeditionary Force should ensure that hostile parties do not work down south across the line Shushtar-Ispahan. You must not expect to receive further reinforcements for the force. On the contrary, it may become necessary to withdraw the XIIIth Division, which was sent to the country in order to assist in the attempted relief of Kut.

APPENDIX II.

Copy of telegram No. 878 of February 24, 1917, from General Officer Commanding Mesopotamia Force to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.

IN view of the change brought about in situation by recent successes on Tigris front, I shall be glad to learn whether His Majesty's Government in any way desire to modify their instructions conveyed to me in your 23374 Cipher, dated the 30th September, 1916.

Until I get your reply I do not propose to delay, but intend to follow up retreating enemy closely, being careful, however, to do nothing which will prevent me from adjourning my position readily according to your further orders. Enemy has suffered very severely during past 2½ months and his losses have been out of all proportion to his strength. Also we have captured over 4,500 prisoners besides guns and machine guns, rifles, ammunition, and material. This series of reverses would have completely broken troops possessed of less fighting qualities than Turks. Opportunity would, therefore, seem favourable for further advance if this accords with policy of His Majesty's Government. Scope of such advance would depend on information received as to further enemy reinforcements being diverted in this direction. Owing, however, to heavy losses already incurred by Turkish forces as above, these, unless considerably more than we anticipate at present, have now lost much of their value.

APPENDIX III.

*Agreement signed at Anglo-French Conference held at Calais,
February 26 and 27, 1917.*

1. THE French War Committee and the British War Cabinet approve of the plan of operations on the Western Front as explained to them by General Nivelle and Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig on the 26th February, 1917.

2. With the object of ensuring complete unity of command during the forthcoming military operations referred to above, the French War Committee and the British War Cabinet have agreed to the following arrangements:—

- (1.) Whereas the primary object of the forthcoming military operations referred to in paragraph 1 is to drive the enemy from French soil, and whereas the French Army disposes of larger effectives than the British, the British War Cabinet recognises that the general direction of the campaign should be in the hands of the French Commander-in-Chief.
- (2.) With this object in view, the British War Cabinet engages itself to direct the Field-Marshal Commanding the British Expeditionary Force to conform his plans of operation to the general strategical plans of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army.
- (3.) The British War Cabinet further engages itself to direct that during the period intervening between the date of the signature of this agreement, and the date of the commencement of the operations referred to in paragraph 1, the Field-Marshal Commanding the British Expeditionary Force shall conform his preparations to the views of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army, except in so far as he considers that this would endanger the safety of his Army, or prejudice its success, and, in any case where Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig may feel bound on these grounds to depart from General Nivelle's instructions, he shall report the action taken, together with the reasons for such action, to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, for the information of the British War Cabinet.
- (4.) The British War Cabinet further engages itself to instruct the Field-Marshal Commanding the British Expeditionary Force that, after the date of the commencement of the forthcoming operations referred to in paragraph 1, and up to the termination of these operations, he shall conform to the orders of the Commander-in-Chief of the French Army in all matters relating to the conduct of the operations, it being understood that the British Commander will be left free to choose the means he will employ, and the methods of utilising his troops in that sector of operations allotted to him by the French Commander-in-Chief in the original plan.
- (5.) The British War Cabinet and Government and the French Government, each so far as concerns its own Army, will be the judge of the date at which the operations referred to in paragraph 1 are to be considered as at an end. When so ended, the arrangement in force before the commencement of the operations will be re-established.

(Signed) M. BRIAND.

(Signed) LYAUTEY.

(Signed) R. NIVELLE.

(Signed) LLOYD GEORGE.

(Signed) W. R. ROBERTSON, C.I.G.S.

(Signed) D. HAIG, F.-M.

Calais, February 27, 1917.

