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Printed for the War Cabinet. March 1917.

SECRET

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WAR CABINET, 91.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, on Thursday, March 8, 1917, at 11:30 A.M.

Present :

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

<p>The Right Hon. the EARL CURZON OF KEDLESTON, K.G., G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E.</p> <p>The Right Hon. the VISCOUNT MILNER, G.C.B., G.C.M.G.</p>	<p>The Right Hon. A. HENDERSON, M.P.</p> <p>The Right Hon. A. BONAR LAW, M.P.</p>
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The following were also present :—

<p>The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The Right Hon. the EARL OF DERBY, K.G., G.C.V.O., C.B., Secretary of State for War.</p>	<p>General SIR W. R. ROBERTSON, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., D.S.O., Chief of the Imperial General Staff.</p> <p>Admiral SIR J. R. JELlicOE, G.C.B., O.M., G.C.V.O., First Sea Lord of the Admiralty (for Minutes 1 to 10).</p>
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Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary*.

Major L. STORR, *Assistant Secretary*.

Captain CLEMENT JONES, *Assistant Secretary*.

Mesopotamia.

1. THE Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that there was no further news from Mesopotamia.

Ireland.

2. The Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs reported that a very full account of the Prime Minister's statement on Ireland had been sent by the Publicity Department to the American Associated Press.

French Ports.

3. The Secretary of State for War reported that during the last week 193,000 tons were discharged at the French ports serving the British Expeditionary Force, this being the largest amount in any one week, and 30,000 tons in excess of the previous week.

Roumanian Railways.

4. The War Cabinet had under consideration telegram No. 272 from the British Minister at Petrograd, dated the 7th March, 1917, in which it was suggested that a British engineer should be attached, for the direction of the Roumanian Railways, to the Staff of General Sakharoff.

The Secretary of State for War reported that Sir Guy Granet had a suitable candidate who had been Manager of the Buenos Ayres Railway, and who was ready to start immediately with an efficient staff. The War Cabinet decided that—

In the first instance, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should ascertain from the Roumanian Government whether this proposal was acceptable to them.

The Western Front. ⁴

5. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that an additional German division had been located on the Western Front, making six divisions in all brought to the Western theatre since the 1st January. There were indications of preparations in Eastern Belgium for the reception of large numbers of enemy troops.

Submarines.

6. The First Sea Lord made his daily report on mercantile losses from enemy action, and a detailed report of an engagement between a "Q" ship and a submarine (already reported). The "Q" ship was sunk, but there was no doubt that the submarine was sunk also.

Mr. Edison's Inventions.

7. With reference to War Cabinet, 82, Minute 9, the First Sea Lord reported that he had learned from a good source that the United States Government had not completed their investigations of Mr. Edison's reported submarine detector. They were said to be hopeful of success, but the First Sea Lord's informant was of opinion that they would already have announced success if it was probable.

Convoy.

8. With reference to War Cabinet, 73, Minute 9, the First Sea Lord reported that he had discussed the question of convoy for protection against submarines with ten captains of tramp steamers who had had experience. The unanimous opinion had been strongly against convoy, owing to the difficulties of station-keeping, particularly at night, due to the lack of experience of the majority of the officers and the bad coal available. The opinion of the whole of these officers had been that they would very much prefer to sail alone, and that not more than two ships in any case could usefully sail in company.

The Loss of the "Laconia."

9. With reference to War Cabinet, 83, Minute 4, the First Sea Lord reported that, as the result of an official enquiry held at Liverpool, it had transpired that the "Laconia" was torpedoed while zig-zagging at top speed (16 knots).

Spain.

10. The Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported information from Paris to the effect that Spain was making overtures with a view of joining the Allies.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Foreign Office, the First Sea Lord, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the Minister of Munitions, and the Shipping Controller should prepare Memoranda as to the potential value of Spain's possible contribution to the war.

Operations on the
Western Front.

11. The War Cabinet had under consideration correspondence* between Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and General Nivelle in regard to the effect on the Allied plans of the actual and anticipated German withdrawals on the Western Front, together with a communication* from the French Government, dated the 7th March, in which they represent that Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's letter indicates a tendency to avoid carrying out the Agreement signed at Calais on the 27th February (War Cabinet, 82, Appendix III).

The following action was decided on :—

- (a.) The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should convey to M. Briand a personal message from the Prime Minister to the effect that, in the opinion of the War Cabinet, the correspondence indicates that a dangerous divergence of views has arisen between the two Commanders-in-Chief, which is due to changes produced by the German withdrawal since the Calais Conference; that, whatever is the correct view, the results are perilous to the Allied cause; that, in these circumstances, a second Conference between the Heads of the two Governments should, in the opinion of the War Cabinet, take place at once; that, in their opinion, it is most desirable that this should be preceded by a discussion between Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and General Nivelle; that the War Cabinet suggest that this military discussion should take place on Sunday the 11th March, and should be followed by a Conference between the Heads of the Governments on Monday the 12th March; and that the War Cabinet attach the greatest importance to the Conference being held in London, so that it would be necessary for the French Generals to travel on Saturday and M. Briand on Sunday.
- (b.) That the Prime Minister should send a personal letter to M. Briand, explaining fully the views of the British military experts, and the political dangers which the War Cabinet apprehend. This despatch to be drafted immediately, in concert, by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Secretary of the War Cabinet.

(Initialled) D. LL. G.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
March 8, 1917.

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* As these documents are of the most secret character and refer to actual plans of operations, they have not been reproduced.

