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SECRET.

28

WAR CABINET, 96.

Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W., on Wednesday, March 14, 1917, at 12.30 P.M.

Present:

The PRIME MINISTER (*in the Chair*).

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

The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (for whole Meeting). The Right Hon. the EARL OF DERBY, K.G., G.C.V.O., C.B., Secretary of State for War (for whole Meeting).	Field-Marshal SIR DOUGLAS HAIG, G.C.B., G.C.V.O., K.C.I.E. (for Minutes 1 and 2). General SIR W. R. ROBERTSON, G.C.B., K.C.V.O., D.S.O., Chief of the Imperial General Staff (for Minutes 1 and 2).
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Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary*.  
 Fleet Paymaster P. H. ROW, R.N., *Assistant Secretary*.

Anglo-French Conference, March 12 and 13, 1917: Signature of Protocol.

1. THE War Cabinet discussed the terms of a Note to be placed above Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's signature to the protocol to be signed by General Nivelle and himself as the result of the Anglo-French Conference, held in London on the 12th and 13th March. The draft Note prepared by Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig and General Sir William Robertson was approved, subject to the omission of a reference in the original draft to the actual objective of the British Armies during the first stage of the operations of the Allies in 1917, the insertion of which might, in the opinion of the War Cabinet, have the appearance of introducing new matter which was not agreed to at the Anglo-French Conference on the previous day. The Note as finally agreed to is printed in Appendix I.

The Western Front. Operations in 1917. Effect of German Withdrawal on Allied Plans.

2. Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig explained to the War Cabinet the modifications in the plan of operations on the Western Front approved at the Calais Conference on the 26th and 27th February, which had been agreed to by General Nivelle and himself on the previous day, in consequence of the German withdrawal. At the special request of the War Cabinet the Field-Marshal also explained the strategical situation on the Flanders Front from

a defensive point of view. The War Cabinet invited Sir Douglas Haig to state whether he was satisfied that he had—

- (1.) the strategical reserves necessary ; and
- (2.) the personal freedom of action to enable him to deal with a surprise attack by the enemy on the Flanders Front.

As regards the first point, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig assured the War Cabinet that he was satisfied that the redistribution of forces agreed to between General Nivelles and himself had left in his hands at present sufficient reserves to enable him to provide against an attack on the Flanders Front. As regards the second point, he stated that he would have the necessary freedom of action, provided that the Calais Agreement was interpreted by General Nivelles in a reasonable manner ; that is to say, that his available reserves were not taken out of his hands at the critical moment.

Russia :  
Censorship of information from.

3. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs read a number of further telegrams indicating serious developments in the seditious movement in Petrograd.

The War Cabinet decided—

That for the present a strict censorship should be imposed on the publication of any details that might escape the Russian censorship, and that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should initiate the necessary action.

Women Volunteers  
for the Land :  
Minimum Age.

4. Mr. Henderson reported that, in accordance with War Cabinet 95, Minute 1 (b.), he had had a Conference with the President of the Board of Agriculture and the Director of National Service, at which it had been agreed that the minimum age for enrolment should be 18, but that the Boards of Selection should be instructed to give preference to women of 20 and upwards, except where they were satisfied, after careful enquiry, that a woman below that age was equally suitable, both as regards physique and temperament, for service on the land.

The War Cabinet decided that—

Mr. Henderson's report should be adopted and regarded as a Cabinet decision.

Baghdad :  
Proclamation.

5. With reference to War Cabinet 94, Minute 8, Lord Curzon laid before the War Cabinet an amended Proclamation (Appendix II., Paper G.T.-150) which had been drawn up by his Committee.

The War Cabinet approved the same.

Transport Workers'  
Battalion.

6. The Secretary of State for War stated that he had received information to the effect that men could now be spared from the Transport Workers' Battalion, and asked that the decision in War Cabinet 95, Minute 4, might be cancelled.

The War Cabinet asked the Secretary of State for War to forward to the Secretary the information in question for circulation to all concerned, after which the matter would be further dealt with by the War Cabinet. In the meanwhile, War Cabinet 95, Minute 4, was to be considered suspended.

(Initialled) D. Ll. G.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,  
March 14, 1917.

## APPENDIX I.

I AGREE with the above on the understanding that, while I am fully determined to carry out the Calais Agreement in spirit and letter, the British Army and its Commander-in-Chief will be regarded by General Nivelles as Allies and not as subordinates, except during the particular operations which he explained at the Calais Conference.

Further, while I also accept the Agreement respecting the functions of the British Mission at French Headquarters, it should be understood that these functions may be subject to modifications as experience shows to be necessary.

D. HAIG, F. M.

## APPENDIX II.

## BAGHDAD.

*Telegram to Viceroy, Foreign Department, dated March 12, 1917.*

(G.T.-150.)

(Repeated to Sir P. Cox, Basra.)

WAR Cabinet wish following proclamation to be issued by Maude without delay. It requires careful and literary translation in view of wide publicity which it will have in Arabic speaking world:—

*“To the People of Baghdad:”*

“1. In the name of my King and in the name of the peoples over whom he rules, I address you as follows:—

“2. Our military operations have as their object the defeat of the enemy, and the driving of him from these territories. In order to complete this task, I am charged with absolute and supreme control of all regions in which British troops operate, but our armies do not come into your cities and lands as conquerors or enemies, but as liberators.

“3. Since the days of Halaka your city and your lands have been subject to the tyranny of strangers, your palaces have fallen into ruins, your gardens have sunken in desolation, and your forefathers and yourselves have groaned in bondage. Your sons have been carried off to wars not of your seeking, your wealth has been stripped from you by unjust men and squandered in distant places.

“4. Since the days of Midhat, the Turks have talked of reforms, yet do not the ruins and wastes of to-day testify the vanity of those promises?

“5. It is the wish not only of my King and his peoples, but it is also the wish of the great nations with whom he is in alliance, that you should prosper even as in the past, when your lands were fertile, when your ancestors gave to the world literature, science, and art, and when Baghdad city was one of the wonders of the world.

“6. Between your people and the dominions of my King there has been a close bond of interest. For 200 years have the merchants of Baghdad and Great Britain traded together in mutual profit and friendship. On the other hand, the Germans and Turks who have despoiled you and yours, have, for twenty years, made Baghdad a centre of power from which to assail the power of the British and the Allies of the British in Persia and Arabia, therefore the British Government cannot remain indifferent as to what takes place in your country now or in the future, for in duty to the interests of the British people and their Allies the British Government cannot risk that being done in Baghdad again which has been done by the Turks and Germans during the war.

“7. But you people of Baghdad, whose commercial prosperity and whose safety from oppression and invasion must ever be a matter of the closest concern to the British Government, are not to understand that it is the wish of the British Government to impose upon you alien institutions. It is the hope of the British Government that the aspirations of your philosophers and writers shall be realised, and that once again the people of Baghdad shall flourish, enjoying their wealth and

substance under institutions which are in consonance with their sacred laws and their racial ideals. In Hejaz the Arabs have expelled the Turks and Germans who oppressed them and proclaimed the Sherif Hussein as their King, and his Lordship rules in independence and freedom and is the ally of the nations who are fighting against the power of Turkey and Germany ; so, indeed, are the noble Arabs, the Lords of Koweit, Nejd, and Asir.

" 8. Many noble Arabs have perished in the cause of Arab freedom at the hands of those alien rulers, the Turks, who oppressed them. It is the determination of the Government of Great Britain and the Great Powers allied to Great Britain that these noble Arabs shall not have suffered in vain. It is the hope and desire of the British people and the nations in alliance with them that the Arab race may rise once more to greatness and renown among the peoples of the earth, and that it shall bind itself together to this end in unity and concord.

" 9. O people of Baghdad, remember that for 26 generations you have suffered under strange tyrants who have ever endeavoured to set one Arab house against another in order that they might profit by your dissensions. This policy is abhorrent to Great Britain and her Allies, for there can be neither peace nor prosperity where there is enmity and misgovernment. Therefore I am commanded to invite you, through your nobles and elders and representatives, to participate in the management of your civil affairs in collaboration with the political representatives of Great Britain who accompany the British army, so that you may be united with your kinsmen in north, east, south, and west in realising the aspirations of your race."