CONCLUSIONS of a meeting of the Cabinet held at No. 10 Downing Street, S.W., on Monday, 25th September, 1922, at 12 noon.

PRESENT:

The Prime Minister (in the chair)


The Right Hon. Sir L. Worthington-Evans, Bart., G.B.E., M.P., Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. Sir A. Griffith-Beacon, M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.

The Right Hon. Sir Haran Greenwood, Bart., A.C., M.P., Chief Secretary for Ireland.


The Right Hon. T.J. MacNamara, M.P., Minister of Labour.

The Right Hon. Earl of Crawford and Balcarres, A.T., First Commissioner of Works.

The following were also present:


Air Chief Marshal Sir H.M. Trenchard, Bart., A.C.B., D.S.O., A.D.C., Chief of the Air Staff.


Lieut.-Col. Sir J.R. Chancellor, K.C.B., D.S.O., Principal Assistant Secretary, C.I.D.
1. The Prime Minister, on behalf of the Cabinet, offered his cordial felicitations to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs on the result of his mission and on the very skilful way in which he had conducted the negotiations. The Cabinet, before Lord Curzon had left for Paris, had been alive to the difficulties, but these had proved even greater owing to M. Poincaré's attitude, and the result was due to the firm handling of the situation by Lord Curzon. In these circumstances it was the more satisfactory to record that the Allies had reached unity in regard to their first attitude towards Mustapha Kemal. On behalf of his colleagues, therefore, he tendered warm congratulations.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs thanked the Cabinet both for their congratulations and for their support. At no point did the Prime Minister and his colleagues fail to give complete support, going even beyond what he had asked for, and the trust and wide latitude given to him had contributed materially towards the result of the Conference.
2. With reference to Cabinet 50(22)

Conclusion 4, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN

gave his colleagues a full account of his negotia-
tions with M. Poincaré as described in his various
telegrams from Paris and in the British Secretary's
Notes of the Meetings, some of which had already
been circulated. Among the points which Lord
Curzon more particularly emphasised may be mentioned
the following. - M. Poincaré had wished to include
in the portion of the Note in regard to the future
frontiers of Turkey, the words "in accordance with
the full terms of the national pact", but Lord
Curzon had refused to agree to this; the draft
proposed by the British Cabinet (Appendix to
Cabinet 50 (22)) had provided for the return of
Eastern Thrace to Turkish sovereignty: Lord
Curzon, however, had succeeded in obtaining more
favourable conditions than this as the Allied Note
provided that Turkey should recover "Thrace, as
far as the Maritza and Adrianople". The Cabinet's
draft had suggested the withdrawal of the Greek
forces behind the line of the Maritza. In the
Allied Note, Lord Curzon had succeeded in arranging
that the line should be fixed by the Allied Generals
in accord with the Greek and Turkish military
authorities at the Mudania Conference. M. Poincaré
had wished to convert the Mudania Conference into
a preliminary Conference, but Lord Curzon had
insisted that the Conference should be confined to
a single point, namely, the settlement of the line
which the Greek forces should be withdrawn. When the peace Conference took place, the British Government would be opposed everywhere by France and Italy. Some support might be obtained at the Conference from Serbia and Roumania, but these countries were very much afraid of France and could not be counted on in the least to supply any force to maintain the position at the Straits in the meanwhile. He thought that France was relieved at our attitude and that they could be counted on seriously to support us in the negotiations to promote a Conference in accordance with the terms of the Note. In reply to a question as to why the zones which the Angora Government was asked not to enter, either before or during the Conference, had been referred to as "zones which had provisionally been declared neutral", Lord Curzon explained that M. Poincaré had insisted on the insertion of the word "provisionally" partly on the ground that the line had been laid down in 1921 and published by the Allies but not accepted by Mustapha Kemal, and partly because he wanted to leave the Allies free themselves not to regard this line as permanent.

Apart from the congratulations to Lord Curzon, which were recorded above in Conclusion 1, the comment was made at the Cabinet, without any dissent being expressed, that the French desertion of the British troops at Chanak was a most formidable historical event.
2. After completing his review of the Paris negotiations, THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS warned the Cabinet that it was very probable that Mustapha Keral would insist as a condition of the Conference, on the withdrawal of the British troops from the Asiatic side and particularly from Chanak. In these circumstances it would be preferable from a political point of view, either that we should desist from sending further troops, or at least, that the present wide publicity given in the Press to the movements of our Naval, Military and Air forces, should cease.

The view was expressed that it would be dangerous to check the arrival of reinforcements.

As regards the Press, it was pointed out that several important newspapers were still opposed altogether to the Government's policy and would almost certainly refuse not to publish movements of troops. Early in the present crisis the London newspapers had been induced to desist to a certain extent from such publication, but later, they had represented that the movements of troops were being published locally both at home and abroad, and now wider publicity was being given to all such movements.

On a review of the above, the Cabinet agreed:

That short of the establishment of a censorship, which was not at present desirable, no action could usefully be taken to induce the newspapers to refrain from publishing particulars of the movements of our forces.
4. The Secretary of State for War read telegram which he had received from General Harington, reporting the arrival at and subsequent withdrawal of Turkish Cavalry from Krenkouy. He added that the reports that troops were being conveyed by rail from Smyrna to Ismid had not been to prevent Passage of troops.

The First Sea Lord made a statement as to the action that could be taken by the Navy to oppose an advance of the Kemalists along the Ismid Peninsula. Lord Beatty stated that he had discussed the situation with Admiral Webb, who had recently returned from the Near East. Admiral Webb was of opinion that the Navy could play a great part in preventing the advance of the troops along the Peninsula to Scutari. He said that the railway to Scutari, which ran along the seashore, could easily be destroyed by a Destroyer. One road ran parallel to the railway on the southern side of the Peninsula, and was equally exposed to the fire of ships. There was another road running parallel to the shore on the northern side of the Peninsula, which was also exposed to fire, but in a lesser degree. Finally, there was a military road which had been constructed by us, and was equally exposed to fire. Parts of this road could be commanded by the Navy and the Air Force, which, together, could do a good deal to hamper an advance in force of troops along the Peninsula. It must, of course, be understood that he made that statement on the assumption that we still held Constantinople and the European shore of the Bosphorus. If Constantinople were abandoned, an advance of the Kemalists troops along the Ismid Peninsula could not be prevented by purely naval action, for that eventuality it would be necessary to withdraw our naval forces from the Black Sea. Even in those circumstances the advance of the Kemalists troops could be delayed and hampered by naval and aerial action. Lord Beatty then referred to...
Sir Horace Rumbold’s telegram No. 451, pointing out the serious situation that would be created in Constantinople if the Navy were to carry out their instructions regarding the removal of shipping from the Bosphorus and shutting it up in the Golden Horn. It realised that it might be necessary, for political reasons, to delay taking action to control the shipping until the last possible moment, but he desired to point out the difficulties of the Naval Commander would thereby be greatly increased, because the removal and control of a large number of craft in the Bosphorus and the neighbouring waters would take some time to complete.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that it must be realised that no material assistance could be looked for from the French and Italian troops in opposing a Kemalist advance on Constantinople. It was even doubtful if they would co-operate with the British troops in maintaining order in Constantinople. He explained it was not the military policy to withdraw from Constantinople before we were compelled to do so. Instructions had been given to General Harington that we regarded Chanak and the Gallipoli Peninsula as of primary importance; Constantinople came second, and the Ismid Peninsula third in order of importance. General Harington fully intended to remain at Constantinople and to keep order there as long as he was able to do so with the limited forces at his disposal. The defence of Constantinople against a Kemalist attack was an altogether different matter. It would be quite impossible for him to resist such an attack. It was stated that there were now 20,000 armed Turks in Constantinople. If an attack on Constantinople were threatened, these 20,000 Turks would surround our small force, which would be in great danger of being cut off. It was clear, therefore, that if an attack on Constantinople took place our troops must be withdrawn to the Gallipoli Peninsula.
The Prime Minister expressed the opinion that it was desirable to examine that situation more closely. General Harington had stated that he could call 20,000 citizens of Constantinople to form a Civil Guard to help in the maintenance of order. That force would be supported by the British detachment. If it became clear, in the course of the next few days, that the safety of Chanak was assured and that no serious attack on that place was contemplated, it might be possible for General Harington to transfer some of his troops to Chanak, to Ismid and to Constantinople.

He drew the attention of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff to Lord Beatty's statement that all the approaches to Ismid Peninsula were exposed to naval gunfire, and enquired how that new consideration affected the opinion of the General Staff. He agreed that it was most important that our small force in Constantinople should not be allowed to become entangled in street fighting.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff replied that the points raised by the Prime Minister had been very closely studied. He was strongly of opinion, from his experience of the late War, that the advance of a Turkish Army along the Ismid Peninsula could not be prevented by naval action. Naval gunfire could, no doubt, hamper an advance, but it could not prevent an elated and determined army from advancing. General Harington would, no doubt, remain in Constantinople as long as he could safely do so. It was certain that as soon as an attack on Constantinople was developed there would be a simultaneous rising in the City, and in fact our General was operating from a hostile Capital.

The view was expressed that we had no choice but to withdraw from Constantinople if Mustapha Kemal advanced along the Ismid Peninsula. Our troops would then have to be transferred to Gallipoli. We could not be held to blame
for the withdrawal; the responsibility lay with the French, Italians, Serbians and Roumanians, who had declined to give us military support. In view of the critical situation in Constantinople it was most important that no measures of a provocative character, such as interference with the shipping necessary for the economic life of the City, should be taken at the present time.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies called attention to the fact that General Harington had reported that the perimeter of the position at Chanak was only four miles, and not 15 miles as had been previously understood. This fact materially affected the value of the position of Chanak to secure the freedom of navigation of the Dardanelles, for the Turks would find no difficulty in establishing positions on the shore of the Dardanelles either North or South of Chanak.

The First Sea Lord stated that he entirely agreed with General Harington that the Navy should take no action at present which might have the result of precipitating a crisis in Constantinople, but he pointed out that if we were at war at Chanak with the Kemalists we could not remain at peace with them at Constantinople. If the Navy were given carte blanche and sufficient time, they could remove all craft from the Bosphorus and its neighbourhood and prevent the Kemalist forces from entering Constantinople. If the Navy were not allowed to take measures for controlling the shipping until an attack by the Kemalists was imminent and the troops were withdrawn from Constantinople, it would not be possible for the Navy alone to deny the passage of the Bosphorus to the Kemalist forces.

Attention was drawn to the point that if the British forces were withdrawn from Constantinople while the French and Italian forces remained, we should be charged with
abandoning our Allies, just as we had charged the French and Italians with abandoning us at Chanak.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs pointed out that Kemal Pasha was in daily communication with General Pélée. He did not believe that Mustapha Kemal intended to advance against Constantinople, as the French were strongly opposed to his doing so and were using all their influence to induce him to adopt a moderate attitude.

In reply to an enquiry by the Prime Minister, the Chief of the Air Staff stated that the air forces now at Constantinople could hinder and delay a Turkish advance along the Ismid Peninsula, but that they could not guarantee to stop such an advance, as the strength of the air force available was insufficient for that purpose. The Cabinet agreed — with the Navy to stop him.
CONCLUSIONS REACHED BY THE CABINET IN REGARD TO THE NAVAL AND MILITARY SITUATION IN THE NEAR EAST - September 25, 1922.

(a) That it was necessary to recognise the new fact that, in present circumstances, the conditions postulated by the First Sea Lord as essential to the interdiction by the Navy of the passage of the Turkish Nationalist troops (viz., "if given carte-blanche to control of all transports" - Conference of Ministers, September 19th, Conclusion (1)) are not fully realisable, and that our power to hold Constantinople is less because the naval precautions the Admiralty had contemplated would precipitate very serious trouble in Constantinople itself, and that full discretion must be left to the men on the spot.

(b) That, in view of (a), the Admiralty, War Office and Foreign Office should respectively notify the Naval Commander-in-Chief, the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, and the High Commissioner at Constantinople, that the Cabinet had considered Sir Horace Rumbold's telegram No. 450 and concurred in the proposal in the penultimate paragraph that full latitude should be left to the men on the spot (viz., the Admiral, the General, and the High Commissioner), in whom the Government have complete confidence, in regard to the questions raised.

(c) That the Naval Commander-in-Chief was absolved from responsibility for any effect on his original plans owing to the above decisions and that the Admiralty should add in their telegram to the Naval Commander-in-Chief that it was recognised that the effectiveness of measures for the control of shipping would be impaired by delay.

(d) That the above decisions (a) and (b) should not preclude the further consideration of possible steps to prevent the crossing of the Straits by the Turkish Nationals.

(e) To take note that, according to statements by the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the Air Staff, the naval and aerial forces can hamper, delay and embarrass, but not prevent, the approach of the Turkish Nationalist troops to the Bosphorus.

(f) To take note that the Secretary of State for War had informed General Harington that the General's view was agreed to that he should hold Chanak and Gallipoli at all costs and, provided that his task at Chanak was not endangered, should remain at Constantinople as long as it was possible to do so (General Harington's telegram No. 2295, of September 22, 1922).

(g) To take note that General Harington has decided not to utilise the 1,000 men (without rifles) of the Royal Air Force, who are now in the Mediterranean on board the S.S. BRITISH CASTLE en route to Mesopotamia.
5. The Secretary of State for War read a telegram from the High Commissioner (No. 465) reporting the presence of a Greek Battleship and Destroyer at Constantinople.

It was agreed that it was very undesirable that these ships should remain in the neighbourhood of Constantinople. It was pointed out that, if asked to withdraw them, the Greek Government would say that these ships had gone to Constantinople to protect the Greek population of the City in the event of disturbances.

The First Sea Lord stated that the ships could remain at the Greek port of Rodosto until the need for them at Constantinople arose.

The Cabinet agreed—

That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should make representations at Athens to secure the withdrawal of the Greek warships from Constantinople.
While the Cabinet were dispersing, THE PRIME MINISTER and the LORD PRIVY SEAL authorised the Secretary of the Cabinet to make arrangements for a Committee, composed as follows:

Sir John Chancellor (in the Chair);
Representatives of the War Office - (Secretary's Department and General Staff);
Representatives of the Admiralty - (Secretary's Department and War Staff);
Representatives of the Air Ministry - (Secretary's Department and Air Staff);
Representatives of the Foreign Office - (Secretarial Staff and Legal Department);
Representatives of the Board of Trade - (Secretarial Staff);
Representatives of Colonial Office and India
Colonel Walker - Secretary Office;

to meet, with authority to call in as required, representatives of other Departments, for the purpose of examining the War Book and reporting to the Cabinet as to what parts of the War Book should be put in operation in the event of hostilities with the Turkish Nationalists.
7. The Prime Minister drew the attention of the Cabinet to two telegrams received from Geneva (Nos. 49 and 51) in which Lord Balfour asked for the views of the Cabinet in regard to Ireland's entry into the League of Nations. From these telegrams it appeared that a Mr. MacWhite, who represented himself as the agent of the Irish Free State, was putting it about that difficulties were being made by His Majesty's Government as to Ireland's admission to the League. Lord Balfour asked for authority to let it be known, formally and informally, that the British Government would view with satisfaction the conditional admission of Ireland into the League, supposing, as he thought was probable, that an immediate admission was not practicable under Article I of the Covenant. If such conditional membership was refused, he desired that the responsibility should not be on the British Government, but on the Assembly. He presumed that the form of the Irish application should be that she should become a member if and when the Constitution should become finally effective.

The Secretary of State for the Colonies explained that there had been a motion in the Irish Parliament regarding the admission of the Irish Free State into the League. The motion had been opposed by the Free State Government, whose view it was that the Free State should not apply for admission to the League until the Constitution had been passed. It was incumbent upon His Majesty's Government to support the Free State Government on the question.

The Cabinet agreed —

That the Secretary of State for the Colonies should advise the Prime Minister the same afternoon as to the reply to be sent to Lord Balfour.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1,
September 25, 1922.