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WAR CABINET, 358.

*Minutes of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.,
on Monday, March 4, 1918, at 12 noon.*

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. BONAR LAW, M.P.

The Right Hon. G. N. BARNES, M.P.

Lieutenant-General the Right Hon. J. C.
SMUTS, K.C.

The following were also present:—

The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, O.M.,
M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign
Affairs.

The Right Hon. the EARL OF DERBY, K.G.,
G.C.V.O., C.B., Secretary of State for
War.

General SIR H. H. WILSON, K.C.B.,
K.C.M.G., D.S.O., Chief of the Imperial
General Staff.

Admiral SIR R. E. WEMYSS, K.C.B.,
C.M.G., M.V.O., First Sea Lord and
Chief of the Naval Staff.

Lieutenant-Colonel SIR M. P. A. HANKEY, K.C.B., *Secretary.*

Lieutenant-Colonel L. S. AMERY, M.P., *Assistant Secretary.*

Captain E. ABRAHAM, *Assistant Secretary.*

Captain L. F. BURGIS, *Assistant Secretary.*

The Western Front:
Possible German
Attack.

1. WITH reference to War Cabinet 357, Minute 2, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that the Germans appeared to be concentrating at two places on the Western front, viz. :—

(a.) As already reported, opposite the Arras-Peronne front, where 35 divisions were concentrated as compared with a previous 9 divisions.

(b.) In front of the French, opposite the Soissons-Rheims front.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff stated that the total number of German divisions on the Western front was now 183.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff did not attach special importance to the German raid on the Portuguese front, reported in last Saturday's communiqué.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff undertook to ascertain whether the counter-attack mentioned in the communiqué had been made by British or Portuguese troops.

The Italian Front:
Withdrawal of
British Divisions.

09/12/18/22

2. With reference to War Cabinet 357, Minute 3, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported that the Executive Committee for the Control of Reserves was meeting that afternoon at Versailles to settle the question of the transfer of divisions from the Italian to the Western front.

Poland.

3. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported the receipt of information that the Poles had crossed the frontier and had placed themselves under the orders of the Regency Council, which was tantamount to joining the enemy.

Russia:
Japanese Inter-
vention.

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4. With reference to War Cabinet 354, Minute 6, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs stated that the United States had agreed to Japanese intervention in Siberia, subject to the proviso that they, in accordance with their usual custom, would not subscribe to a joint declaration of the Allies, although they would subsequently make a declaration of their own, supporting the Allied policy. Mr. Balfour said that he had drafted a telegram to Tokyo, stating that the United States of America had consented, and that the next move was with Japan. He had also drafted his idea of the sort of proclamation the Allies should make. The telegram, he hoped, would be sent that afternoon.

Loss of steamship
"Calgarian."

5. The First Sea Lord reported that the "Calgarian" was torpedoed on the 1st March, about 8 miles North-West of Rathlin Island, and that only 49 men were missing out of a total of 600 on board.

Stornoway Town
Hall.

6. The First Sea Lord reported that Stornoway Town Hall had been completely gutted by fire on the 2nd instant, but that it was hoped that all the important documents of the naval office established there had been saved.

Submarines.

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7. The First Sea Lord stated that the "Rutherglen" reported that she had rammed a submarine 12 miles South of Holyhead on the 2nd instant. It was feared that this submarine might have been one of our own out on patrol.

Murmansk.

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8. The First Sea Lord read a telegram from the Rear-Admiral Commanding at Murmansk, which stated that the local Soviet had received a telegram from M. Trotzki, saying that peace negotiations had apparently broken off and that measures were being taken to defend Petrograd to the last drop of blood, it was the duty of the Soviet to do everything they could to defend the Murman line, and ordering them to co-operate with Allied Missions in everything. The local Soviet communicated this telegram to the French representative and the Rear-Admiral at Murmansk, and suggested that the executive command of the armed forces under the supreme command of the Council of Workmen's and Soldiers' Deputies should be vested in three persons, one of whom would be appointed by the Council, and the other two would be British and French officers. The Soviet also asked that the British and French should provide armed force, equipment, and stores for the defence of Murmansk as far as possible. Before the receipt of this telegram the Admiralty had decided to reinforce the Rear-Admiral Commanding at Murmansk with a cruiser. The French had undertaken to do the same, and Admiral Sims had made a similar proposal to his Government for consideration.

The Secretary of State for War read a letter from the French Military Attaché on this subject.

The first Sea Lord then read a draft of the instructions he proposed to send to the Rear-Admiral at Murmansk, which stated that it was impossible to send troops to reinforce the garrison at Murmansk, but that one cruiser from Great Britain, one from France, and possibly one from America, were on their way to that port. The Admiral was not to undertake operations against the Bolsheviks except in a case of extreme urgency, and the Rear-Admiral was requested to state what, in his view, would constitute such a case.

The War Cabinet decided that—

The Admiralty should inform the Rear-Admiral that we cannot send land forces; that naval reinforcements are coming; and that he should be authorised to land the troops if, in his judgment, any useful assistance could be given by them to any Russian forces against the Germans.

Bombing of Open Towns.

9. With reference to War Cabinet 353, Minute 7, the War Cabinet had a further short discussion on the subject of air raids on open towns.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs stated that he had replied to the communication received from the Spanish Ambassador in the sense that Great Britain had always deprecated this form of warfare, and were quite prepared to consider any proposals the Germans had to make on the subject.

It was suggested that a public declaration should be made, as it was easily possible to show that the Germans were the first to start raiding open towns. Some doubt being expressed on this point—

The Secretary was instructed to investigate the matter, with the aid of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence, and to report to the War Cabinet at an early date.

Leakage of Information.

10. The attention of the War Cabinet was drawn to the fact that the "Manchester Guardian" had published information which, though incorrect in detail, was substantially similar to that contained in War Cabinet 353, Minute 7. The Spanish Minister had complained to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs of this leakage.

Relief of Higher Command.

11. The Secretary of State for War stated that the Army Council wished to establish a flow of promotion in the British Expeditionary Force. It was felt that it would be very hard, in the event of certain commanders being removed from their posts without any reason being assigned for removing them except to help promotion, that they should suddenly be reduced from full to half-pay. Lord Derby said that it was proposed shortly to bring home eight corps commanders, now in France. Two commands at home would shortly become vacant. He asked the authorisation of the War Cabinet to retain all eight officers on full pay for three months at home, after which they should then revert to half-pay if not again required to hold commands in France, or at home.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he was in agreement with this proposal, but, as it involved a departure from the usual Treasury practice, he had thought it necessary to obtain War Cabinet sanction.

The War Cabinet agreed to this proposal.

Transport of
American
Divisions.

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transport
1004.

12. With reference to the transport of six American divisions to France, the Secretary of State for War stated that he was in communication with Lord Reading on this subject, and would be glad if the War Cabinet would postpone its discussion until he had received further particulars from Lord Reading.

2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.,
March 4, 1918.