CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the Cabinet held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on MONDAY, 16th MARCH, 1936, at 11.0 a.m.

PRESENT:

The Right Hon. Stanley Baldwin, M.P., Prime Minister. (In the Chair).

The Right Hon. J. Ramsay MacDonald, M.P., Lord President of the Council.

The Right Hon. The Viscount Hailsham, Lord Chancellor.

The Right Hon. Anthony Eden, M.C., M.P., Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

The Right Hon. A. Duff Cooper, D.S.O., M.P., Secretary of State for War.

The Right Hon. The Viscount Swinton, G.B.E., M.C., Secretary of State for Air.


The Right Hon. The Viscount Monsell, G.B.E., First Lord of the Admiralty.

The Right Hon. Walter Elliot, M.C., M.P., Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.


The Right Hon. Neville Chamberlain, M.P., Chancellor of the Exchequer.


The Right Hon. Malcolm MacDonald, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs.

The Most Hon. The Marquess of Zetland, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E., Secretary of State for India.

The Right Hon. Walter Runciman, M.P., President of the Board of Trade.

The Right Hon. Lord Astor of 塞特兰, M.P., Minister without Portfolio.

The Right Hon. Oliver Stanley, M.C., M.P., President of the Board of Education.

The Right Hon. Ernest Brown, M.C., M.P., Minister of Labour.


1. The Prime Minister reported that the situation had been kept under continuous observation by a small group of Ministers. Events had moved rapidly, however, and he thought it as well to summon the Cabinet in order that his colleagues might be kept fully informed.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported that the negotiations so far had passed through three phases:

(1) A preliminary phase prior to the proposals of the Belgian Prime Minister;
(2) A second stage in which the Belgian Prime Minister had developed his views; and
(3) A third stage subsequent to that event.

In the first stage each chief delegate had stated his position. The French adopted the same attitude as in Paris, namely, that international law must be vindicated by a German withdrawal from the demilitarised zone before negotiations took place. The Belgians had thought that withdrawal from the demilitarised zone was rather too much to ask of the Germans and had taken up a more moderate position, though if that were refused by the Germans they proposed to go through to the end with the Locarno procedure.

Our own attitude had been governed by the desire to utilise Herr Hitler's offers in order to obtain a permanent settlement. As M. Van Zeeland occupied the middle position he had been asked to put his views in writing. His proposals, which had been circulated to the Cabinet, had been discussed at two meetings but no longer held the field. At the second discussion M. Paul Boncour had been present.
fresh from Paris, and had expressed astonishment at how far the Powers had drifted away from the French attitude. M. Flandin had then been asked to circulate a paper. After consulting Paris, and some of his colleagues, M. Flandin reported with that regard to M. Van Zeeland's proposals, they were not a basis for discussion by the French Government. The French Government had then been asked to make their own proposals, especially so far as security for France and Belgium was concerned. That was the position on Saturday. M. Flandin had then asked if British Ministers would produce their proposals. This request had been refused at the moment but the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and his colleagues had formulated some suggestions which he circulated later to the Cabinet for consideration. (See Conclusion 2).

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that he had met M. Flandin on the previous day and had had a frank talk with him of an hour and one-half's duration. He had already reported the matter to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and to the Prime Minister. M. Flandin at first outlined the situation in France. Apparently his own position and that of the French Government was very difficult with an election in prospect. He anticipated a combination between M. Tardieu (who was supposed to have retired from politics and to be writing books) the Croix de Feu and the Royalists and other disgruntled parties of the Right who united in criticising Parliamentary methods and threatened action on fascist lines. M. Flandin was also much concerned at the European situation.
By her action in the Rhineland and the unilateral tearing up of treaties Germany had gone far to destroy confidence in international treaties. Unless international law was vindicated he apprehended that among the smaller nations there would be a sauvé-qui-peut and some of them were likely to run to Germany. Therefore he regarded a vindication of international law as essential. M. Flandin had thought he saw progress in some quarters here towards that attitude but he realised that the British nation could not agree to put sanctions on Germany as they had agreed in the case of Italy. M. Flandin was quite clear that France did not want war, but only that international law should be vindicated. He had made a suggestion that the Locarno Powers should close their ports to German shipping and stop all financial accommodation to Germany. He realised that the League as a whole could not be counted on to co-operate in this. He thought, however, that if the Locarno Powers would do so the situation would be such that Germany would have to give way.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer himself did not take that view and had suggested another possibility. He recalled that in a conversation with Herr Hitler, Mr. Ward Price had made a suggestion that international force should be introduced into the demilitarised zone, as had happened in the case of the Saar. It would have to be stationed on both sides of the frontier. He had put that proposal to M. Flandin and it had been extremely well-received. M. Flandin had thought it would help France and be regarded as an action for the
upholding of international law. The Chancellor of the Exchequer himself had suggested that there should be equal numbers stationed on both sides of the frontier, though in the aggregate it would only be a small symbolic force and not sufficient to stop an invader. M. Plandin had said that he could not formally accept the proposal, but he was 90% sure that his Government would accept it.

The next step after an international occupation, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had suggested was that the Locarno Powers should then meet.

M. Plandin, referring to the permanent terms of the settlement, had asked about fortifications.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that to prohibit the erection of fortifications in the Rhineland would be very difficult as Herr Hitler was extremely tender about his right to anything that others were allowed to do.

M. Plandin had replied that the French fortifications were incomplete; that the Belgian fortifications were not regarded by the French as satisfactory; and that consequently the French were extending their fortifications towards the Channel.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that if the French and Belgian fortifications were so incomplete that they could be held up, that might be an assistance.

The next question raised had been that of additional security to France and Belgium owing to the German occupation of the Rhineland.

M. Plandin had asked what the British Government would think of the proposal that had been discussed at a meeting of the Locarno Powers for a pact of mutual assistance?
The Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that he did not think that Herr Hitler would enter any such pact as it was known he did not believe in multi-lateral pacts and preferred bi-lateral arrangements. But if there were to be a truce for twenty-five years and a non-aggression pact Herr Hitler could hardly object to the conclusion of the security pacts. In fact he had said so to the British Ambassador in Berlin.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer had then commented on the fact that M. Flandin wanted some/more specific in the way of assurances from this country. That, he had pointed out, would present a difficulty. There was a powerful school of thought in this country that disliked mutual pacts and would like to escape even from existing pacts. He had assured M. Flandin, however, that if he liked to put forward proposals they would be carefully considered.

M. Flandin replied that on such lines solutions might be found acceptable to the French Government.

The result of this conversation, therefore, was a suggestion for a truce during which an international force, largely British in character, would be stationed on both sides of the frontier. There would be no objection to a stipulation that neither Germany nor France nor Belgium should maintain troops adjacent to the frontier. There would be no fortification during negotiations.
After these arrangements had been made, further discussions would take place for a permanent settlement on the basis of non-aggression pacts; no increase in fortifications; pacts of mutual assistance between France, Belgium and Great Britain, which would be open to Germany to join, if she so desired; the above pacts to be more strict and more closely defined. In addition, the pacts should offer the same guarantees to us as to the other nations.

In addition to the above the Chancellor of the Exchequer said that M. Flandin had asked what the British Government would do if Germany came back to the League of Nations and demanded colonies: also what Sir Samuel Hoare had meant by his reference to raw materials at Geneva?

As regards the second point, the Chancellor of the Exchequer had replied that Sir Samuel Hoare had felt that the question of colonies was going to be raised soon by Germany and had therefore anticipated this by raising the question in the least objectionable form. The British Government realised quite well that Germany's real object was not raw materials but the return of colonies.

M. Flandin had then asked what we should do if the question of colonies was raised.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer replied that the Cabinet had not yet discussed the matter. Personally, however, he thought that if we were in sight of an all-round settlement the British Government ought to consider the question.

- 6 -
M. Flandin then asked whether there could be an exchange of letters between the two countries undertaking not to discuss colonies with the Germans without consultation?

The Chancellor of the Exchequer himself had replied that the two countries ought to discuss the matter, but he did not like the idea of an exchange of letters, which had somewhat surprised M. Flandin who had thought it would be interpreted as meaning that we did not intend to give up any colony. So far as French colonies were concerned he was prepared to consider the question, but he feared lest by embarking on conversations first we might "queer his pitch".

M. Flandin had then asked if the British Government could state a maximum point beyond which they could not go: e.g. that the Germans must consent not to construct fortifications in the demilitarised zone.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer had given him no encouragement on this line.

M. Flandin had then expressed his strong desire for a united policy between the two countries.

The President of the Board of Trade said he had spoken to M. Flandin for two hours on the previous evening. For the most part his conversation had been general, but he had been much concerned with his own internal situation in France. He had said that there were many Communists in France and that the Franco-Soviet pact had had a good effect among them, changing some of them into Nationalists. He had been much concerned about his political opponents and thought that the sooner he returned to France to make contact, the better.
The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that M. Flandin had already decided to go to Paris not later than Wednesday.

The Prime Minister said that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had informed him of the above on the previous evening. He himself had discussed with some of his colleagues a little earlier the proposal to send British troops to form part of an international force in the Rhineland. He himself was strongly in favour of this proposal. He had anticipated that it would not arise at the moment but he congratulated the Chancellor of the Exchequer on seizing the opportunity that had offered and in mentioning it. He thought it would strike the imagination of Europe and British soldiers would almost certainly fulfil a very valuable role, making friends with all whom they meet.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs fully agreed with the Prime Minister in thanking the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

The idea of using an international force during a truce made a strong appeal to the Cabinet, who agreed:

(a) That the question should be examined at once by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, who should be asked to report on the military aspects of the proposal as soon as possible as it would probably be necessary for the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to refer to it in his conversations with French Ministers on the following day:

(b) That the Prime Minister should consider whether in the light of the Report of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, or any other Committee, it was necessary for him to summon a further meeting of the Cabinet.
2. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs handed round a Memorandum entitled "Germany and the Locarno Treaty" (C.P. 79 (36)) in which, after recording the main facts of the present situation, he proposed that the future structure of security in Western Europe should be in two parts: first, non-aggression pacts between Germany, France, and Belgium and perhaps Holland which would be guaranteed by Great Britain and Italy; second, a superstructure consisting of a pact for mutual assistance between Great Britain, France, and Belgium which would be open to Germany. Appended to the Memorandum were practical proposals under the heading "Suggested Procedure".

The Prime Minister enjoined on his colleagues the great secrecy of the Memorandum handed round by the Secretary of State and the discussion thereon, and asked that his colleagues should exercise the utmost reticence on the subject in conversation even with their personal staffs. (See Conclusion (a) below).

After discussion the suggested procedure paragraph by paragraph, the Cabinet agreed:

(a) That owing to its secrecy the Memorandum by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (C.P. 79 (36)) should be handed back to the Secretary of State at the end of the discussion.

(N.B. The copies were handed back with two or three exceptions in the case of Ministers who had special reason to study the proposals. A copy is available on the standard file of the Cabinet Conclusions in the custody of the Secretary to the Cabinet).

(b) To approve the proposals headed "Suggested Procedure" attached to C.P. 79 (36) subject to certain drafting alterations which were mainly designed to render them easier of acceptance by the German Government, and subject to the following amendment to replace paragraph 4 (iii) -

"the framing of pacts of mutual assistance to reinforce the security of the parties concerned."
(N.B. The object of the latter alteration was to get rid of the idea of "compensation to France and Belgium" by additional commitments at our expense, and to permit reciprocity by which we should benefit as much as the other Powers concerned).

(c) That the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs should be authorised, if he thought advisable, to communicate the suggested procedure, as amended above, to the French Ministers in the course of conversation on the following day when M. Flandin would be presenting his own proposals. It should be made clear that we should have to insist on some quid pro quo in the form of mutual assistance to ourselves.

(For discussion relating to the Dominions, see following Conclusion).
3. In the course of the discussions referred to in the two preceding Conclusions, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs referred to the attitude of the Dominions with whom he was keeping in close touch. The Dominions had always been critics of the Locarno Treaty on the ground that it involved a military commitment on the United Kingdom which was not shared by the Dominions. Consequently, if the commitment matured, a very awkward situation would arise and probably several of the Dominions would stand out. The only way he could see to surmount this difficulty in any mutual guarantee treaty to replace Locarno was by bringing in all the members of the League which would enable the Dominions to come in with the others.

It was pointed out that this proposal would enormously extend our commitment as it would bring in nations like Russia who would want to be guaranteed against Japan.

The Prime Minister expressed much sympathy with the position of the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. He wondered whether if the Dominions could be better instructed on the historical aspects of our attitude towards the Low Countries and the actualities of the present situation, it might be easier to secure their agreement.

The Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs said that he had kept them well informed of all aspects of the situation. He did not think it would be possible to get them to accept any commitments. He would not press his proposal for extending the commitment to cover the whole League, but he emphasised that it was extremely important as negotiations proceeded to bear the position of the Dominions in mind. The representatives of the
Dominions in London did not agree at all with the French attitude. He hoped, therefore, that under any new arrangement we should not be committed to action unless an actual invasion of French or Belgian territory took place.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs informed the Cabinet that this would be the case.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer expressed the hope that the French view was understood by the Dominions. Up to now they had never contemplated war but merely that if all the Locarno Powers, other than Germany, stood together Herr Hitler would have to give way. His own objection to the French plan had been that even if it were adopted it could not produce a settlement.
The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs reported that the German Embassy was maintaining that there was a mistranslation in their reply to the League's invitation to come to London and that in the following sentence -

"On this ground it can only take part in the proceedings of the Council if it receives a definite assurance that the Powers in question are prepared forthwith to enter into negotiation in regard to the German proposals."

the word "forthwith" ought to be translated "in due course". The Foreign Office took the view that the German word "alshald" had been correctly translated.

As regards the first of the German conditions, namely, that their representative would be on a footing of equality at the Council meeting, he saw no particular difficulty. As regards the second condition, however, namely, negotiations in regard to the German proposals, complications would arise since the German proposals did not affect the Council of the League of Nations but only a few of the Members including, more particularly, the Locarno Powers, Austria and Czechoslovakia. This made it rather difficult for the League as a whole to accept the condition.

The suggestion was made that the reply to condition 2 might be that the League was not in a position to comment on it because at the moment the Council was only considering the German occupation of the Demilitarised Zone.

There was some discussion at this point on the desirability of getting some contact with the Germans as soon as possible either by the presence of a German representative in London, or possibly a little later by sending a special British representative to Berlin.

The Lord President of the Council left at this point.
5. The First Lord of the Admiralty reported that he was in sight of concluding a Three Power Treaty between France, the United States and ourselves. He wanted to get it signed as soon as possible because France was getting restive. We ourselves, however, before signing had wanted to be certain that Germany would sign. The French, however, had not been willing to envisage a German signature. Consequently, he was trying to obtain bi-lateral treaties with other countries, namely, Germany and Russia. Germany was being helpful in the negotiations. He understood, however, that the Foreign Office felt some doubts as to whether in present conditions negotiations ought to go on with Germany. That appeared to him a wrong view. The negotiations had throughout been kept very quiet and had attracted little public interest. We had negotiated with the Italians even while we were applying sanctions. It appeared a mistake to adopt a different course with Germany, and he did not think this would help the main negotiations with Germany. He thought on the whole that it would have a calming effect if it became known that the Naval Treaty negotiations with Germany were continuing. The Naval Conference had survived many shocks, and it would be a great pity if it were stopped by this. There was no question of signing until the German signature was obtained.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said he did not mind the continuance of negotiations but he thought that the present moment would be a bad time for signing a Treaty with Germany.
The Cabinet agreed:

To authorise the First Lord of the Admiralty to continue negotiations with Germany on the understanding that there was no question of signing a Treaty with them at the present time.
6. In reply to a question from a colleague, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that there had been strong rumours of some arrangement between the Russian Soviet and Czechoslovakia under which some hundreds of Russian aeroplanes were to be allowed to alight at Czechoslovakian aerodromes en route to France. He had questioned M. Flandin on the subject who had categorically denied that there was any truth in the suggestion.
7. The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs in reply to a question, said that the Italian Ambassador had indicated a strong desire to try and liquidate the position as regards sanctions on Italy. The latest news from Abyssinia indicated that the situation resulting from the Italian victories was not so bad as the Italians made out.

The First Lord of the Admiralty warned the Cabinet that the only ships in Europe capable of dealing with the German pocket battleships were the battle-cruisers "Hood", "Renown" and "Repulse". The latter was at home in dock, and unless the two former were withdrawn from the Mediterranean, our shipping would be exposed to the German pocket battleships in any emergency. Even if some of His Majesty's ships were to be withdrawn from the Mediterranean, it would be possible to hold the two ends of the Mediterranean with a sufficient force without home waters being depleted so seriously.

The Secretary of State for Air emphasised that with so many aircraft and airmen in Egypt the air position at home was deplorable. It would be difficult to imagine a worse situation so far as the Air Force was concerned if an emergency should arise.

The Secretary of State for War reported that the position was as bad so far as the Army was concerned. If in addition to the Forces in Egypt a British Force was to form part of an International Force on the Rhine, the position would be worse than ever.

A suggestion was made that if no oil sanction was to be imposed, some of the Imperial Defence Forces might be withdrawn from the Mediterranean.
The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs said that the question would probably be discussed by the Committee of Thirteen during the present meetings of the League in London.

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2, Whitehall Gardens, S.W.1.,
16th March, 1936.
SECRET.
C.P. 79 (36).

CABINET.

GERMANY AND THE LOCARNO TREATY.

Memorandum by Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs.

M. FLANDIN in the course of his last conversation at the meeting of the Locarno Powers invited His Majesty’s Government to produce at our next meeting some statement of our policy and procedure which might form a basis of discussion. We resisted this appeal, and maintained that we would prefer to study M. Flandin’s views before putting forward our own.

At the same time it is clearly desirable, if only for the purpose of clearing our own mind, that we prepare some statement of our own views. For this purpose I circulate the attached paper to my colleagues.

In connection with paragraph 4 (iii), M. van Zeeland had formulated certain proposals (see Foreign Office despatch to Brussels No. 149 of the 14th March). They were as follows:

(a) Automatic functioning of the action of the guarantors in the agreements replacing the Locarno Treaties;
(b) Agreement regarding the establishment of contacts between the General Staffs to lay down the technical conditions in which the obligations undertaken in the Pacts would eventually be brought into effect;
(c) Increase of the material precautions laid down in the multilateral Pacts.

In my view the future structure of security in Western Europe should be in two parts: First, non-aggression pacts between Germany and France and Belgium, and perhaps Holland, which would be guaranteed by Great Britain and Italy. Second, a superstructure consisting of a pact of mutual assistance between Great Britain, France and Belgium, which would be open to Germany. It must be anticipated that France and Belgium will desire that this pact of mutual assistance should approach as near as possible to what the Belgian Prime Minister describes as “automatic functioning.” In any event, it is certain that both these Governments will ask that the pact of mutual assistance shall include agreement on the establishment of contacts between the General Staffs of the signatory Powers.

A. E.

Foreign Office, March 15, 1936.
(A) Finding by the Council, under Article 4 (2) of Locarno, that a breach of Article 43 of the Treaty of Versailles has been committed and notification of the finding to the Locarno Powers.

(B) Resolution by the Council on the following lines:—

1. Condemnation of Germany's action on following lines (Belgian draft):—

   "The Council of the League of Nations decides—
   
   (1) That the scrupulous respect for all treaty obligations is a fundamental principle of international life and an essential condition of the maintenance of peace;
   
   (2) That it is an essential principle of the law of nations that no Power can liberate itself from the engagements of a treaty nor modify the stipulations thereof unless with the consent of the other contracting Parties;
   
   (3) That the breach of Article 43 of the Treaty of Versailles and the unilateral repudiation of the Treaties of Locarno by the German Government is in contradiction with these principles;
   
   (4) That by this unilateral action the German Government confers upon itself no legal rights;
   
   (5) That this unilateral action, by introducing a new disturbing element into the international situation, must necessarily appear to be a threat to European security.

2. Invitation to France and Germany to refer to either the Permanent Court of International Justice or the Permanent Court of Arbitration the question of the compatibility of the Franco-Soviet Pact with Locarno, and any other matters which it might be thought proper so to refer.

   (N.B.—The Belgian proposal was to refer "the German complaints" to the Franco-German Conciliation Commission provided for under Locarno. The question whether the reference should be to conciliation or to one of the above Courts depends on the matters which it might be decided to deal with in this way.)

3. Arrangements to be laid down by the Council for the period pending and during negotiations proposed under 4.

   (a) Reaffirmation of Locarno by the signatory Powers other than Germany. The following draft has been suggested:—

      "Nothing which has happened before or since the said breach has absolved the signatories under the Treaty of Locarno from any of their obligations or guarantees, which remain in their entirety until a new convention is concluded."

   (b) Stationing of an International Force, including British troops, on either side of the frontiers between France and Germany and between Belgium and Germany.

   (c) In view of the despatch of the International Force, recommendation to Germany, France and Belgium to suspend immediately all despatch of troops or war material into the frontier zones* of the three countries, not to construct any new fortifications in those areas, and to suspend work on existing fortifications.

4. The Council takes note of the German proposals 2 to 7 and invites the five Locarno Powers to negotiate on basis of:—

   (i) These German proposals so far as they concern the five Locarno Powers.
   
   (ii) Revision of the status of the Rhineland on the basis of equality of rights of neighbouring States.
   
   (iii) Compensation to France and Belgium for the diminution of security which the revision of the status of the Rhineland in the sense indicated above would represent for them.

March 15, 1936.

* Extent of these zones to be specified ultimately.