CONCLUSIONS of a Meeting of the War Cabinet held at 10 Downing Street, S.W.1, on Monday, September 4, 1939, at 11.30 A.M.

Present:

The Right Hon. NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN, M.P., Prime Minister (in the Chair).
Admiral of the Fleet the Right Hon. LORD CHATFIELD, Minister for Co-ordination of Defence.
The Right Hon. L. HORE-BELISHA, M.P., Secretary of State for War.
The Right Hon. Sir SAMUEL HOARE, Bt, M.P., Lord Privy Seal.

The following were also present:
The Right Hon. ANTHONY EDEN, M.P., Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs (Items 1-10).
The Right Hon. WALTER E. ELLIOT, M.P., Minister of Health (Item 11).
Sir HORACE J. WILSON, Permanent Secretary to the Treasury.
Admiral of the Fleet Sir DUDLEY POUND, First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff (Items 1-10).

Brigadier J. N. KENNEDY, Deputy Director of Military Operations, War Office (Items 1-10).

Secretariat:

SIR EDWARD BRIDGES.
Major-General H. L. THURSTON.
Colonel F. C. HODGES, M.B.
Captain A. D. PRESTON, R.N.
Mr. W. D. SIMPSON.
Mr. P. C. O'GRADY.
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1. The War Cabinet was informed that the Turkish authorities were increasing their demands for immediate action, and that the matter had been referred to the Foreign Office for consideration. The situation was such that we could only hope that, by the time the matter was referred, the Turks would be more amenable to our demands. But the main issue was whether we could persuade them to keep Turkey within our orbit. The only door by which we could get between Germany would be through Turkey and Roumania. It was vital that the conclusion of the Turkish Agreement should not be held up owing to financial considerations, although we should, of course, make the best arrangement possible.

The War Cabinet agreed—

(a) that on military as well as political grounds it was of the utmost importance to conclude the Agreement with Turkey as soon as possible;

(b) that the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in consultation with the Chancellor of the Exchequer, should arrange for the despatch of a telegram to His Majesty's Ambassador at Ankara explaining the difficulties regarding a gold loan to Turkey, and the various ways in which we could afford help to Turkey, and instructing him to ascertain the terms on which Turkey could be induced to sign the agreement.

Italy.

2. A short discussion took place on the position of Italy, of which the main points were as follows: There was good reason to believe that Mussolini was anxious to avoid becoming involved in war against us as he was to keep out of a war with Germany. If we issued an ultimatum demanding that he should show his hand as a neutral, it would merely throw him into the arms of Germany. Italy had further to go now than she had in 1914 before she would be induced to throw in her lot with us, desirable as this ultimate object might be, with all its consequences regarding fleet dispositions in the Mediterranean and the ability to tighten the blockade on Germany. Any rationing scheme to be imposed on Italy would require tactful handling. When the Ministry of Economic Warfare took up the question of rationing Italy, due regard would have to be given to the political aspect.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement, and agreed that, before any plan to be drawn up by the Ministry of Economic Warfare for rationing Italy was put into operation, the implications from the political point of view should be fully considered.

Japan.

3. Reference was made to the position of Japan and to the need for ensuring her neutrality.

The Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs explained that serious delays had occurred in handing over the four men accused of terrorism to the local Court, but that he expected that they would be handed over before long. Any suggestion of the revival of our efforts to secure her neutrality as a long-term objective, would need to be treated with caution, in view of the fact that she had been more independent in her attitude towards us than she had been towards other countries.
Eire had declared her neutrality, and her attitude was set out in a message that had appeared in *The Times* that morning. No more recent information was available. In this connection, the importance of the availability of South Irish ports, *e.g.*, Berehaven, as a base for naval forces, was stressed.

5. The Chief of the Air Staff made a statement on the operations on the previous night under two headings: (a) operations against German ships reported in the North Sea, (b) dropping of leaflets. As to the latter, during the night aircraft had distributed propaganda leaflets over Hamburg, Bremen and the Ruhr. One aircraft was at present missing. They had encountered no fighters, and only ineffective anti-aircraft fire. There had been considerable confusion caused by reports from different sources in Holland of the passage of aircraft said to be approaching Great Britain, and some of these might have been aircraft returning from dropping leaflets. Their courses had been studied, and it was certain that they had not flown over Holland. Further reconnaissances had been ordered for to-day, to discover the whereabouts of the German Fleet, and bombers were standing by. The Advanced Air Striking Force was in France, and nearly ready to operate, though at reduced intensity.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

The Chief of the Air Staff said that he had been pressed by the French to employ the Air Striking Force in collaboration with the French Army. He was opposed to any such action at a time when the French Army was not undertaking active operations. It was important to conserve the resources of the Air Striking Force, so that it would be ready to meet any great emergency, such as heavy air attack on this country, or an attempted break-through in France.

The First Lord of the Admiralty pointed out that the main German effort was concentrated against Poland, and every means possible should be employed to relieve the pressure. This could be done by operations against the Siegfried Line, which was at present thinly held. The burden of such operations would fall on the French Army and our Air Force.

It was generally agreed that a combined plan for an operation against Germany to relieve the pressure on Poland was a vital necessity, and that the Chiefs of Staff should make immediate contact with General Gamelin, with a view to concerting the action of the French and British Forces. It was thought that a telegram should be despatched forthwith to General Gamelin, suggesting that the Chief of the Air Staff and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff should come over to France to meet him that afternoon for a preliminary discussion. This meeting would serve, to discover the French Army Plan, and the best means by which our Air Striking Force could collaborate could then be devised. After the Chiefs of Staff had conferred with General Gamelin, it would probably be desirable for the Prime Minister to confer with General Gamelin on the Inter-Allied policy for the conduct of the campaign, and the question of the setting up of the permanent military commission would be settled. These meetings would be followed by the setting up of the permanent military commission, which was to be the setting up of the permanent military commission as soon as the question of the setting up of the permanent military commission was settled. In the meanwhile, the French ought to take steps to conclude the

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**Attitude of the Dominions.**

(Previous Reference: W.M. (39), 1st Conclusions, Minute 5.)

South Africa.

Eire.

**Report on the Air Situation.**

Operations on 3rd September.

Operations contemplated on 4th September.

Inter-Allied Operations in Support of Poland.
more than willing to co-operate with our air forces in the co-ordinated plan, but that we did not propose to undertake co-ordinated bombing which would lead to no permanent military result, but would cause unnecessary loss of aircraft. The French should be asked to conform, and not to employ their air force in the manner which they had suggested to the Chief of the Air Staff until a plan had been agreed.

The War Cabinet agreed —

(1) That the Chiefs of Staff should at once see General Gamelin, and should discuss matters with him on the lines set out above. 

(2) That as soon as the Chiefs of Staff had agreed upon the inter-allied plan of operations, the question of an early meeting of the Supreme War Council should be considered.

Naval Situation.

Sinking of S/S Athenia and S/S Blairbeg.

6. The First Lord of the Admiralty reported that steamship Athenia, outward bound with 300 Americans on board had been sunk 200 miles North-West of Ireland at 2 P.M. on the 3rd September, 1939. It was understood that the passengers and crew were in the ship's boats. Two destroyers were hastening to the rescue and should be near the scene. The occurrence should have a helpful effect as regards public opinion in the United States.

The steamship Blairbeg had been sunk 70 miles North-West of Ireland. H.M.S. Renown had detached her anti-submarine escort of two destroyers to the rescue.

The War Cabinet were informed that the routing of merchant ships was in force, but the convoy system had not yet been started.

Reference was made to the statement in the Joint Anglo-French Declaration that we should abide by the Submarine Protocol of 1936. Germany was one of the Powers which had adhered to the Protocol.

Convooy System.

Away Situation.

A.D.G.B. and Field Force.

Military situation in Poland.

7. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff reported on the position as regards the air defences of Great Britain and the date of arrival in France of the Field Force.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff gave the War Cabinet a picture of the Military situation in Poland, as he saw it. The concentration of as many as 32 German divisions in Slovakia had come as a surprise. The country between Slovakia and Poland was extremely difficult for military operations, and presented administrative problems of great magnitude. If the Germans were able to carry out their plan, the Poles would have to face an attack in enormous strength from the South.

The Chief of the Imperial General Staff expressed the personal view that the crushing of Poland by Germany in a few weeks was most improbable.

Arrangements.

8. The Prime Minister raised the question of supplying information as to the situation to Ministers who were not members of the War Cabinet. One suggestion would be that weekly appreciations on the situation should be prepared by the Chiefs of Staff. Another suggestion was that occasional Meetings should be held of Ministers to inform them of the position.

Both these suggestions met with approval, and the War Cabinet agreed —

With (Sir) Austen Chamberlain. That the Prime Minister should make such arrangements as he thought fit in this matter.
10. The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that Exchange Control had now been established, and that it was intended to establish the Dollar rate at just about 4 Dollars to the Pound. His Majesty's Government would now be the market, and would say at what rate we would buy and sell Dollars. If the Pound was kept at a figure below 4 Dollars, we might exasperate the United States and there would be a risk of a sharp rise in prices.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer said that it was proposed shortly to take certain steps in regard to our gold reserves, which he explained to the War Cabinet. These steps would be taken under powers conferred by Finance Regulations made under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act.

The War Cabinet took note of this statement.

11. The War Cabinet had before them a Joint Memorandum by the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland, in which a decision was asked for on certain matters arising in connection with the National Registration Bill now before the House of Commons.

The War Cabinet were informed that the salient points were:

(a) the recommendation of the Minister of Health and the Secretary of State for Scotland that National Registration Day should be fixed for the Friday in the fifth week from the present date, viz., the 6th October;

(b) the recommendation of the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster that Food Rationing (which was an essential feature of Food Control) should be brought into force in three weeks from the present date.

The suggestion was made that it might be possible to bring National Registration and Food Rationing into operation simultaneously, in which event the introduction of Food Rationing would be greatly simplified. After discussion it was agreed that Food Rationing could not be postponed long enough to make the simultaneous introduction of the two measures possible.

The Minister of Health informed his colleagues that it was not his intention to make any reference to the question of food rationing during the passage of the National Registration Bill.

The War Cabinet agreed:

(i) that National Registration Day should be fixed for the Friday in the fifth week from the present date, viz., the 6th October;

(ii) to consider at a later date the separate question of when Food Rationing should be introduced.

12. It was suggested to the War Cabinet that the decision of the House and country in constant indefatigably would have the effect that as public opinion increased the higher the price of food, the greater would be the support for food rationing.
It was pointed out that, in the uncertainties of the present stage of the war, it would not be undesirable to encourage crowds to gather in public places, particularly in Central London. On the other hand, it was suggested that there was a case for permitting places of entertainment to open in the hours of daylight, and possibly also in the suburbs after dark.

The Home Secretary was invited to consider the matter in consultation with the Secretary of State for Air, the Police Authorities, and the R.B.C.

13. The Prime Minister suggested that, in addition to the War Cabinet (which might be called the Home Policy Committee) should be set up to consider all domestic questions which required the cooperation of more than one Department or which were of such importance that they would otherwise call for consideration by the Cabinet. The Committee should have a wide discretion in dealing finally with questions on which agreement was reached, and should refer to the War Cabinet only such large questions of policy as required Cabinet sanction or questions on which they had been unable to reach agreement. The Home Policy Committee would deal with all the social services, including education, and other domestic topics such as the maintenance of trade and industry and agriculture. Perhaps the most important functions of the Committee would be in connection with the attitude of labour; it must be anticipated that considerable political importance would be attached throughout the war to the wage situation (especially in relation to the question of profits, cost of living, &c.).

Acute questions would also arise in connection with any measure for the conscription of labour that might be decided upon.

The Prime Minister said that the new Committee would, in fact, deal with all questions affecting the Home Front other than the questions directly related to Civil Defence which would be dealt with by the Home Security Committee.

In a word, the Committee would be given the task of considering the effect on general War Cabinet policy of any new domestic requirement that might arise.

There would be work for the Committee in the near future in connection with the issue of the Regulations under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act. Such Regulations ought to be examined by a body with a general viewpoint.

The War Cabinet agreed:

To appoint a Home Policy Committee consisting of the following:

- The Lord Privy Seal (in the Chair).
- The Lord Chancellor.
- The Home Secretary and Minister of Home Security.
- The Secretary of State for Scotland.
- The President of the Board of Trade.
- The President of the Board of Education.
- The Secretary of State for Scotland.
- The Minister of Health.
- The Minister of Labour.
- The Minister of Agriculture and Fisheries.
- The Minister of Transport.
- The Minister of Food.
- The Minister of Information.
- The Lord Chancellor.
- The Financial Secretary to the Treasury.

HANSARD 1803-1884, Cols. 671-674, 9th August 1915
ANNEX.

(Most Secret.)

To be sent by War Office in cypher to Military Attaché in Paris.

FOLLOWING for General Gamelin:

"British War Cabinet are very desirous of co-operating at once in any effective military and air operations against the German forces on the Western Front. They therefore consider it vital that immediate agreement should be reached between the Franco-British Military and Air Authorities as to the part which their respective forces are to play.

"The Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Chief of the Air Staff will arrive in Paris this afternoon to discuss such arrangements with you personally. It is hoped that British Chiefs of Staff will be able to return here to-night with a view to placing immediate proposals before the British War Cabinet, and that similarly you will be able to place agreed proposals before your Government at once. Meanwhile the British War Cabinet trust that the French Air Force will refrain from any action until decisions have been reached as to the policy for the use of the Air Forces. It is hoped that this will be concerted as the result of this afternoon's meeting between yourself and the British Chiefs of Staff."

(Signed) H. L. ISMAY.

Approved by the Prime Minister 1 P.M.

(Initialled) H. L. I.

September 4, 1939.